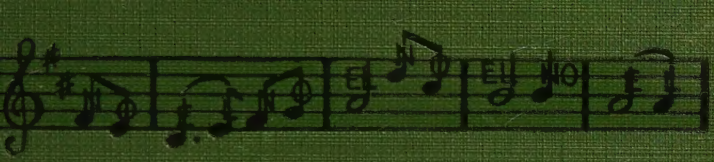

The Christmas Canticles

By George Elliott

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DI LUCA DELLA ROBBIA

THE CHRISTMAS CANTICLES

By
GEORGE ELLIOTT

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign.
—*Christina Rossetti.*

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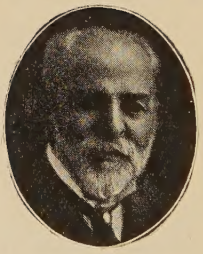

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GEORGE ELLIOTT

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TO MY WIFE AND CHILDREN

IN MEMORY OF

OUR MANY CHRISTMASES

WHICH HAVE REVEALED TO ME THE CHRISTIAN HOME AS THE HOLY FAMILY; ALL MOTHERHOOD AS SACRED AND EVERY CHILD AS "THAT HOLY THING."

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A PRELUDE

"There's a song in the air!
There's a star in the sky!"

THE Psalter has been called "the hymn-book of all the ages." Its poetry is set to music. It is made to be sung. As Carlyle says, all poetry is "musical thought." To this collection of sacred lyrics, begun by David and not completed until after the exile in which Hebrew harps were hung on the willows beside the Babylonian stream, the New Testament adds another group of Messianic psalms, recorded by Luke in his beautiful story of the Advent of the Christ.

Whenever heaven touches earth and God and man come together, the celestial harmonies take the sounds of this world, clothe their disorder with rhythm, arrange their jangling sequences into melody, and blend their harsh dissonances into euphony. Christmas lends a new splendor to the stars and a new sweetness to song.

This little book is born out of nearly fifty years' meditation at Christmas time on the Canticles of the Incarnation. Four of its chapters have appeared as Christmas editorials in the *Methodist Review*. These with the others which appear for the first time in print are now sent forth to all friends, known and unknown, wishing them "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!"

GEORGE ELLIOTT.

New York City, 1922.

I

THE CANTICLES OF THE INCARNATION

TRADITION claims that Saint Luke was an artist, a painter, to whom we are indebted for the portrait of our Lord. For that there is little proof. But the artistic temperament is revealed in his literary style. Renan calls his Gospel "the most beautiful book in the world." Poetry and music meet on his pages, and even his prose sings in rhythmic cadence. He places the chancel in the very porch of his cathedral of holy history and many voices sing at the gateway. The Virgin Mother in the glad madrigal of the *Magnificat;* Zacharias the priest intoning the *Benedictus,* song of the Gospel dawn; Elisabeth greeting her kinswoman Mary in a rhythmic chant; and the aged Simeon, singing the sunset hymn of his life, the *Nunc Dimittis* —these are the human quartet whose solos, on varied keys, succeed each other with strange harmony. And overhead God

sends an angelic chorus rendering that heavenly anthem, the *Gloria in Excelsis.*

It was fitting that the newborn Redeemer should be greeted with psalms of praise. As of old around the ark of the covenant the Levitical musicians marched with trumpets and cymbals, and as about the throne of God the ranks of shining seraphs render their *Trisagion* of "Holy, holy, holy!" so now earth and heaven agree in a great Christmas oratorio. To the Babe of Bethlehem wealth and wisdom from the East brought their offerings of gold and fragrance; so Poetry the most intellectual and Music the most spiritual of the arts came also with their beauteous tributes of psalmody and song.

Criticism, indeed, has seen a difficulty in the picture of four pious people, of humble birth and surroundings, suddenly breaking out in a flame of poetic rapture and then sinking back into prosaic silence. But criticism to reach correct results must not exclude imagination and intuition. The poetic splendor of these passages does not lift them out of the sphere of history. It is not unnatural for the Oriental mind to

think in symbols and for Oriental speech to blossom with flowers of rhetoric. "All passionate language does of itself become musical. All deep things are Song." [1]

Abbé Didon, in his *Life of Jesus Christ*, has stated the case strongly and simply:

> Poetry is the language of intense expression and sublime ideas. Among the Jews, as all Eastern people, it overflowed with inspiration. Every soul is poetic, and joy or grief sets it singing. If ever a heart should have burst into an inspired hymn, it would certainly be that of a young maid chosen of God to be the mother of the Messiah. She borrowed from the Bible stories of the women who before her had been deeply moved by their maternity, as Leah and the mother of Samuel, the phrases which she expanded and transfigured. National hymns which celebrate the mercy, wisdom, power, and faithfulness of God, constantly return upon lips like hers accustomed to sing them.

This is a characteristic of religious revival. Every moral and spiritual awaking of the mind of man finds its emotional outlet in sacred song. The early Christians were a singing people. Luther, with his rugged battle-hymns of trumpet meter, conquered northern Europe as much by

[1] Thomas Carlyle.

music and song as by sermon. John Wesley well knew that the lyrics of his brother Charles were worth as much to Methodism as his own propaganda by voice and pen.

Back of this fact lies the fundamental philosophy of all true art. God is greatest of all artists. He is the supreme Poet, and Creation is his poem. He is the Infinite Musician, and Redemption is his song. "Nature lays her beam in music," and the ancient myth of the "music of the spheres" is but a symbol of that rhythm which underlies all the handiwork of God. The true and highest muse is the Holy Spirit. When the creative Spirit brooded over chaos he attuned it to cosmic melody, and when the redemptive Spirit touched the lips of the dumb priest and entered the life of the Virgin of Nazareth, the primeval anthem of the morning stars became the New Song of the kingdom of God. The loftiest lyrics are not sparks from the anvil of genius, but live coals from the altar of God. Music is closely linked to worship. Singing is the speech of holy joy as prayer is the language of holy desire.

"Devotion borrows music's tone
And music takes devotion's wing."

All loftiest art was born at the altar of God and to that shrine should return with its richest gifts.

The Bible is a book of songs. It begins and ends, like creation, in music.

"From harmony, from heavenly harmony
This universal frame began;
From harmony to harmony
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
The diapason closing full in man."[2]

Not only nature but revelation is filled with the Divine Presence and therefore vibrant with the rhythm of law, the melody of beauty, and the harmony of love. The Songs of Scripture are GOD-SONGS. They are from God, about God, for God, and to God. God sings, for Zephaniah says, "He shall rejoice over you with singing." Nature sings, for we are told that "the mountains and the hills break forth into singing" before the Lord. And at last History sings, for into the discords of its sin and strife God sends his Son to subdue the

[2] John Dryden.

harsh dissonance of earth with the harmonies of heaven.

It is because the Bible is not a cold treatise on either science, history, philosophy, or theology, but real literature in which feeling and imagination play as large a part as reason and understanding, that we dare not interpret it by the crude literalism of formal logic but in terms of life and love.

These Messianic Psalms of the New Testament which we have called the Christmas Canticles, are constructed in the literary form of Old Testament Psalmody. Hebrew poetry is peculiar in its structure. While it is not without music to the ear, its real rhythm is to the soul, that thought-rhythm expressed both by parallelism and antithesis, which Herder has described as like "the rapid stroke of alternate wings," and the "heaving and sinking of a troubled heart." This thought rhythm is like the music of nature, the beating of waves, the swelling of tides, the throbbing of hearts, the coming and going of light.

Not only in structure but in substance these canticles of Christmas are like ancient

Hebrew poetry. They repeat with new emphasis the ideas of psalmist and prophet. This itself is a strong proof of their genuineness. Had they been composed later, they would have been full of personal references to the Christ who had come, and would have been alive with Christian phrases like the hymns heard by the apocalyptic seer. Their very reserve as to the facts of the incarnation and atonement testifies to their historic truth as being salutations to the newborn King and not the reflective hymns of a later generation.

Christmas is the day of songs, for on this day the music of eternity came into time. God is the supreme Poet and Jesus Christ his perfect Poem. Can we better spend that festival week between Christmas and the New Year than in studying the singers and meditating upon the songs?

II

THE VIRGIN MOTHER—THE FIRST NEW TESTAMENT SINGER

SAINT LUKE puts his choir of Messianic singers in the porch of his Gospel; he also leads us through the Beautiful Gate of the Temple into the court of the women. Perhaps it was his profession as a physician that filled him with feministic sympathy, and it may have been helped by his pastorate of the Philippian church, the center of whose life was a group of holy women. A tinge of the Lydian purple has possessed his historic spirit. It is he who pictures Elisabeth the priest's wife and Anna the prophetess; he mentions the ministering women, the widow of Nain, the sisters of Bethany, and many more. His is the most human of Gospels, the gospel of tenderness and tolerance.

It seems quite certain that as messages from the lips of Joseph supplied

the material for the infancy stories in Matthew, it was personal memoirs of the Virgin Mother that inspired the first three chapters of Luke—the most lovely literature of the world.

Mary, a maiden of Nazareth, traditionally the daughter of Joachim and Anna, was probably related to both the tribes of Judah and Levi. So in her Son are united the royal and sacerdotal lines. As King, he sways the scepter of universal dominion; as Priest he swings the censer of perpetual intercession.

To her home in Nazareth came Gabriel, the messenger of God. What was the scene of the annunciation? Was it at that fountain where the girls of Galilee still gather? or in a garden where this Rose of Hebrew womanhood stood among the lilies of the annunciation? Better still, and more likely, it may have been in her own home, the true sanctuary of all motherhood. She may have been at work weaving sacred linen for the Holy Place at Jerusalem and embroidering them with the lily-work which is still her symbol. Or she may have been at prayer.

As her body became the shrine where met the divine and the human, so her chamber was doubtless the true temple of her worship. This last is made probable by the phrase "he came in unto her."

Then she is saluted with those heavenly courtesies which are not as meaningless as those of earth. "Hail, thou highly favored one!" The angelic salutation witnesses her fitness for the heavenly honor of a divine motherhood. *Plena gratiæ!*—"full of grace," there was in her nature such a wealth of beauty and grace as made her worthy among women for this high choice. And then he announces the mission of Mary and the mystery of the virgin birth. Great and sublime are many missions to which God has called men; but surely there never was one so great as this, the highest which heaven ever addressed to a mortal. Through her royal motherhood the Eternal Son of God came into brotherhood with you and me. Can we imagine the soul lifted at once to such an earthly and temporary shame and such an heavenly and eternal fame?

To the daughters of Israel there was no dream so divine as that of Messianic motherhood. Before the gates of Eden were bolted with flame, there came the *Protevangelion*, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," and the sad face of the first mother fallen in sorrow at the foot of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is lighted by a gleam from the looks of Jesus flung back through the ages. And now promise comes to fulfillment and that first name of the mother of all living, *EVA*, is transposed into *AVE*, Hail! that greets the mother of Him who shall again open the gates of paradise and lead us to the Tree of Life.

The primal grace of her character is purity. It is as the *Virgin* Mary that we honor her. Hers is the charm of the undefiled soul. No painter has violated this tradition. While she fills in Christian art the place taken by Venus in paganism, it is with a marvelous difference. The gaze of Mary is always one of mingled innocence and sadness. This charm of chastity is the inner secret of

man's reverence for woman. There can be no shock to human nature greater than loss of faith in this which is the pride and glory of the world.

Another trait is her submissiveness. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word." God stands on ceremony with his finite creatures; he awaits our consent to his mandate. Her soul did not tinge with any colors of its own the white ray of the heavenly will; she is filled with the pure sunlight of the divine purpose. She, the daughter of Abraham, is called to a test of fidelity not less severe than his, is called to the surrender of the dearest possession of maidenhood, her fair fame; is called to endure the suspicion of her betrothed, and the possible scorn of friends. And her pure soul proceeds to penetrate the black cloud of humiliation with the white light of holy self-abnegation. The modern craze for self-expression, born of fake psychology, is a poor thing beside the nobler task of winning a self which is worthy of expression.

Hers was a true patriotism. We have

already noted the passionate hope of Messianic motherhood. No women have ever been more intensely national in spirit than the daughters of Israel. Love of their historic ideals is mingled with the life-blood in their veins. This is the supreme need of America and of every land. When women become frivolous, selfish, and vain, men will be vicious, dishonest, and brutal. No great cause can ever succeed without the aid of womanhood. Not in a man's way, nor by abandoning her nobler functions for his, but from the imperial throne of a divine motherhood shall she rule the race. This is the woman's patriotism, whose theme sounds again and again in the Song of Deborah, the Hymn of Hannah, and the canticle of the *Magnificat*.

The thoughtfulness of Mary is significant. Her outburst into song is exceptional; for the most part hers is the reserved beauty of a quiet life. She is sparing of speech. The gospel has recorded this phase of her psychology: "She considered in herself"; "she pondered in her heart." Who shall disclose

the hidden poetry of a mother's heart? Men and women, have you ever allowed yourselves to guess how deeply the little things of your lives have sunk into your mother's soul and there formed that fairest mosaic of her thought of you?

Her thoughtfulness prepared the way for her great renunciation. The sword soon enters her heart. All parents must faintly feel a like experience. The coming of our children to independent life produces a perplexity hard to understand and harder still to bear. At Cana, at Capernaum, and at Calvary she passed through both a spiritual and a physical bereavement. This is the pathetic history of the generations, "Mine, yet mine no more!"

This human tragedy of life and love has its compensation of high joyfulness. Her hymn is one of triumphant gladness. "*Mater Dolorosa*," "Our Lady of Sorrows," she shall share in the gift of Pentecost; she is now nearest the throne of glory.

What is the true glory of Mary? We must lay aside both the traditions of Rome and the prejudices of Protestantism —those colored glasses we too frequently

use to avoid the glare of Papal superstitions—if we want a true portrait of the Virgin Mother.

The dangerous dogma of the immaculate conception of the blessed Virgin was delivered by Pope Pius IX, in spite of the fact that it had been opposed by many of the greatest theologians, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, in all the Christian centuries. And the Vatican Council confirmed the doctrine by declaring the Pope infallible! There is no hint of this papal heresy in the Holy Scriptures, although they do ascribe the highest honor to Mary.

Without doubt, Mariolatry grew by the perversion of a partly lost truth of the incarnation—the need of a human God and of the divine Fatherhood. When Christ had lost his humanness in mediæval dogmatism, and when men saw in him only the stern Judge and King of the Byzantine mosaics, a world submerged in sensuality and strife found its path to the heart of God through the mother love of Mary. One can see the result to-day in all Roman Catholic countries. There

is real pathos and a true, though distorted, meaning in the tawdry dolls surrounded by candles in the shrines and chapels dedicated to the Virgin, and the heart-breaking appeal, *Maria Helf!* The bruised heart needs not philosophy but compassion. The Dark Ages would have been saved from their blindness and gloom had they kept the Christ who wept as well as him that shall judge. For in our Lord there is not only the manly brain but the womanly heart, and we shall ever be conquered by the "mother in his eyes."

Poetic literature abounds in these perverted pictures of the Virgin Mother, which if persisted in would as surely destroy her humanness as mediæval dogmatism that of her Son. Such a great Christian Platonist as Henry Vaughan dared to write:

"Bright Queen of Heaven! God's Virgin Spouse,
The glad world's blessed maid!
Whose beauty tied life to thy house
And brought us saving aid.
Thou art the true Lover's-Knot; by thee
God is made our ally,
And man's inferior essence he
With his did dignify."

These lovely lines need not be interpreted in terms of Roman dogma, as must this audacious passage from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem "Ave":

"Mother of the fair delight,
Thou handmaid perfect in God's sight,
Now sitting *fourth* beside the *Three*,
Thyself a woman-Trinity,
Being a daughter born to God,
Mother of Christ from stall to rood,
And wife unto the Holy Ghost."

More moderate and not without a somewhat exaggerated vision of the real truth are these stanzas from Robert Steven Hawker:

"A shape like folded light, embodied air;
Yet wreathed with flesh and warm;
All that of heaven is feminine and fair,
Molded in human form,

"She stood, the Lady Shechinah of earth,
A chancel for the sky,
Where woke to breath and beauty God's own Birth
For men to see him by."

There is, however, a real Nemesis in Mariolatry. It wrongs the human race and cheats Christ's sisters of their sweet queen. When at last removed from human sympathies, if she had no knowledge of

sin and has assumed a quasi-divinity, then her tenderness is lost, and even now Romanists are beginning to call upon Saint Joseph and Saint Anna to speak to the Virgin for them. Safer, sounder, and sweeter is the vision of Mrs. Browning of this "blessedest of women":

"I am not proud!
Albeit in my flesh God sent his Son;
Albeit over him my head is bowed
As others bow before him. Still my heart
Bows lower than their knees. O centuries,
Say of me as the Heavenly said, 'Thou blessedest
Of women!' Blessedest,
Not holiest, noblest—no high name
Whose hight misplaced may pierce me like a shame
Where I sit meek in Heaven."

Mary has a true glory, but a glory that we mortals may share. We may claim the high qualities that made her "highly favored." Ours may be that stainless purity, sweet submission, lofty enthusiasm, thoughtful tenderness, and lowly self-sacrifice which have made her worthy to be praised by all the generations. So Keble sings:

"*Ave Maria!* thou whose name
All but adoring love may claim,

Yet may we reach thy shrine,
For he, thy Son and Saviour, vows
To crown all lowly, lofty brows
With love and joy like thine.

"Blessed is the womb that bore him, blest
The bosom where his lips were pressed;
But rather blest are they
Who hear his word and keep it well
The living homes where Christ may dwell
And never pass away."

All motherhood and childhood are glorified by the incarnation. The curse of Eden has been transformed into a crown. Every child has become "that holy thing." Every theory of woman's work which makes anything nobler than maternity is condemned by the blessed example of this White Rose of Israel, this fairest flower of womanhood. May this be true of every man and woman:

"Make her hands like the hands of Mary
Blessing the little one;
Make her lips like the lips of Mary
Kissing her Blessed Son."

Mary did not doubt as did Zacharias when Gabriel came with his astounding

annunciation. She wondered as to the mode—"How can this come to me, an unmarried woman?"—but she questioned not the fact, and asked no sign nor proof. Strange paradox! Mother and virgin! but not more strange than the union of God and man. So faith brings to reason its high assurance.

We may not wish to use the ancient title given to Mary, "Mother of God"—but she was the mother of Him in whom God was manifested in the flesh. She was not a goddess-mother; she was a truly human mother. Out of her flesh He took flesh; his bodily frame was inherited from his human mother. Probably some features of his face and form resembled her and revealed his earthly heredity. Did he also inherit a human soul from her? Biblical psychology never shall be able to decide between the contending theories of Creationism and Traducianism. Tertullian and Jerome, Augustine and Pelagius, and theologians in all time will differ. Even a materialist like Lucretius was puzzled with this problem of parentage:

"For it cannot be said what are the conditions of the soul,
Whether it is itself begotten or produced in those that are begotten."

Theology, in the formula of the Council of Chalcedon, has rather doubtfully denied the element of personality to the humanity of our Lord. But dare we do it when we remember that personality is the chiefest of all human attributes? Whether his human soul came by inheritance from his mother or by the direct creation of God, of one thing we are assured—he was the Son of *Man*, possessing all human qualities, and the heir and representative of all mankind.

While physically he was the Son of Mary, and may have resembled her in form and feature, psychically he was the Child of all humanity, as spiritually he was the Son of God. He is Kinsman of all kindreds. Art has tried to express this truth by portraying him with racial features as to his bodily form. Italian artists paint him in lovely Latin lines; French, German, and Spanish painters have pictured him as transformed into

their own national types; and, even now, Hindoo Christians are dreaming of an Oriental Christ. He does belong to all races and each can rightly claim him as its own, but his full being is composite of them all. We do not know in what manner God may reveal himself to other worlds.

"Nor in our little day,
May his devices with the heavens be guessed,
His pilgrimage to thread the Milky Way
Or his bestowals there be manifest."[1]

In some future time we may compare with the citizens of the constellations "in what guise He trod the Pleiades, the Lion, the Bear," and—

"O, be prepared, my Soul!
To read the inconceivable, to scan
The million forms of God those Stars unroll
When, in our turn, we show to them a Man."[1]

And so the Virgin mother soon came to see that her Son was more than *her* Son—that he had a "Father's house" at Jerusalem as well as the humble home at Nazareth, that there were mysteries

[1] Alice Meynell.

in his inward thought that even her maternal insight could not penetrate, and that he could find a higher brotherhood and motherhood in all who could share his harmony with the Father's will.

All this does not belittle the glory of Mary. It was high honor that she became the frail vessel of earth through which the whole of humanity received *their* Child and Brother. No higher function has ever been granted to earthly flesh and blood and of that honor none could have been more worthy than she.

> "Praise Mary Mother!
> Mary, none other
> Welcome might the Holy Ghost
> Because her soul was pure the most."[2]

For us all she brought forth the Christ. Shall we not share her joy and make our own rhapsody her Messianic Psalm, the *Magnificat?*

[2] Lionel Johnson.

III

THE *MAGNIFICAT*—THE MADRIGAL OF MARY

THE heart of the Nazarene maiden, made happy by the promise of Messianic motherhood, a gladness darkened by the gathering clouds of social misunderstanding, seeks the solace of holy sisterhood. She finds it far away in the home at Hebron, near the oak of Father Abraham, the graves of the patriarchs, and that of her great ancestress, Sarah, to whom had come, as to her kinswoman Elisabeth, the miracle of sterile age suddenly flowering into fertility.

It was a long journey southward across the plains of Esdraelon, filled with the martial memories of Gideon and Barak, and past the brook Kishon beside which Deborah sang. Perhaps she quenched her thirst at Jacob's Well, where later her Son shall lead an erring woman to the light. Then through Jerusalem and Beth-

lehem, past Rachel's tomb and the fields where Ruth had "stood among the golden corn." Then by rugged roads up the high hills to Hebron. Here these two common village women met and by their meeting were transformed into prophetesses and poetesses by the overshadowing Spirit of God. Surely some memories of the road are in the rapturous psalm that Mary sings. The long journey had suggested many thoughts, and her presence had added a new sacredness to the places she had passed.

"Blest earth, whereon she trod,
Put forth your fragrance sweet:
Blest hills that felt her feet
The mother with her God.

"More blest ye friends, whose guest
She now doth silence break,
Of heavenly things to speak,
And where her footsteps rest."[1]

Any touch of sorrow that checked the rising rapture of her spirit was ended at once by the salutation of Elisabeth. She greets her young relation with the first beatitude of the New Testament. Like

[1] The Paris Breviary.

the canticles, it is expressed in Hebrew rhythm and in two strophes of four lines each:

"Blest among women art thou
And blessed the fruit of thy womb!
And whence this to me
That the mother of my Lord should visit me?

"For lo! as the voice of thy greeting reached my ears,
The babe in my womb leaped for joy.
And blessed is she who believed the fulfillment
Of the Lord's words to her."

It is pleasant to meet a friend, but divine is the delight when the presence of a third one, the Holy Spirit, makes understanding secure and sympathy perfect. And now her spirit, to whom that Holy Presence has already come in adumbration of the approaching birth, breaks out in sacred song. Her hymn is a mosaic of the psalmody of Israel. She is like a Puritan maiden to whom the phrases of Holy Writ have become the native atmosphere of thought and speech. She must have known by heart many Hebrew hymns, for the *Magnificat* contains at least fifteen Old Testament phrases, interwoven and transmuted into a new beauty

and meaning. "The pure heart makes the best Psalter." Shall we be astonished if the humble consciousness of her high and holy designation as the Mother of the Lord draws forth from Mary's heart and lips the most magnificent cry of joy that ever leaped from the human soul?

The *Magnificat* links the old dispensation and the new, it is an interlude between the Law and the Gospel. It is the swan song of Hebraism and an overture for Christianity. It finds its basic material in the hymn that Hannah sang after the birth of her son Samuel. But a new spirit inspires this canticle. There is a legend that Mary found a flower without perfume in the garden at Hebron and, having touched it, that flower has been filled with fragrance ever since. So she took the triumphant ode of a proud woman of the past and filled it with the sweetness of her gentler spirit.

The *Magnificat* is a song of the soul. "My soul doth magnify the Lord." Soon the shepherds shall hear a chorus in the sky, but she finds one in her heart. Not the lips alone, but the inward being

sings. The faculties of mind and heart form a choir for the praise of God. So may all that is within us bless his holy name. Reason with its majestic bass, Love with its full-voiced soprano, Conscience with clear-toned tenor—all are led by Will in the praise of the Lord. "The Lord"—that is the keynote of her song. It is a true *Te Deum*, full of suggested doxologies. There is an underlying rhythm of life, an inward music that the soul alone can sing, a secret heaven in the breast where already the choirs of glory have begun their harmonies.

God is the supreme theme of all music and poetry. "Sing unto the Lord," cry the minstrels of the past. He inspires the song of Moses as he chants, "The Lord is my strength and my song," and Mary echoes that strain of old, "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord."

The *Magnificat* celebrates the might of God. Elisabeth had praised Mary, but the meek maiden transfers the eulogy to the great and mighty God. It is not an answer to the greeting of Elisabeth, nor is it an *as*cription of adoration to the Almighty; it

is, rather, a *de*scription of the worshipful meditation going on in mind and heart. She is overpowered with a sense of the divine greatness and adoringly prostrates her finite littleness before the vision of the Infinite One. It is a comfort in our weakness to know that we have a great God. Our frailty takes courage when we can hide under the shadow of the divine strength. The universe has a single source of power—it is the arm of God. Not only is it true, as Mary sings, "He hath done a deed of might with his arm," but back of all forces works the Omnipotent will of God.

The *Magnificat* sees the Almighty God as the master of history. All earthly pomp and power vanish at his touch. The new life that stirs within the Virgin Mother shall subdue all mundane strength. Gibbon remembered a phrase of this song as he sat on the steps of the Capitol at Rome and planned *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* So passed and shall pass all earthly priests and potentates—Pilate and Herod, Caiaphas and Cæsar, Sanhedrin and Senate—but God lives and

Christ, the Son of the Most High, lives, and shall live and reign forevermore.

The *Magnificat* in one phrase pictures the moral character of God. "Holy is his Name!" Isaiah seven hundred years before had seen the divine splendor and contemplated the divine character, interpreted for him by the seraph's *Tersanctus*, "Holy, holy, holy!" And his favorite name for Jehovah was "the Holy One of Israel." And that most evangelical prophet in his message of hope to his own age had promised a mystic birth of a delivering Prince—a dream which became an ideal of Israel to be fulfilled in the future. And now, with that wonderful birth starting songs in her soul, Isaiah's vision becomes her own, and her inner life is flooded with the white light of the holiness of God.

The *Magnificat* magnifies the mercy of God. We join with her as we sing Heber's glorious hymn to the blessed Trinity: "Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty." Religion never can rest in the natural attributes of God. If he were nothing but strength, we should be afraid of him

and flee from him. It is highest joy to know that his boundless power is ruled by a huge tenderness. God is not only great but good, and goodness is the highest greatness. "Saviour" is in the first strophe of her song and "Mercy" in the last. It is a strain echoed a little later in the *Benedictus* when the husband of Elisabeth tells of "the tender mercy of our God." Mercy is a little gift in human lives but in the divine nature it becomes clothed with his greatness. It is no longer a slowly dropped cordial from a jeweled vase, or the trickling of a slender rill, but it becomes wide and wealthy as sunlight, as broad and bright as the skies, as impartial as the heavenly gift of rain. It is a celestial river rising in the heart of God, which shall flood the earth with the river of salvation. And "Saviour" was a new word to the pagan world. It filled that dark realm of unrest and despair with wonder and a new hope. There is an old story of a Roman orator who had seen it somewhere engraved on a tombstone and wrote, "*Salvator*—a new word but very beautiful it seems to me!"

But it was an old word to Israel, who had heard Jehovah speak: "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." Now it burst forth big with new meanings and bright with higher hopes. The message of mercy has gone singing down the Christian centuries. We hear its echo in such strains as Johann Rothe, the Moravian, sings in a hymn which, like the *Magnificat*, is a mosaic of many passages of Scripture:

"O love, thou bottomless abyss,
My sins are swallowed up in thee;
Covered is my unrighteousness,
No spot of guilt remains in me;
While Jesus' blood through earth and skies
Mercy, free boundless mercy, cries!"

And Charles Wesley in that historic hymn which is one of the "birth songs of the Evangelical Revival," shouts shortly after his own conversion:

"'Tis mercy all! let heaven adore.
Let angel minds inquire no more."

For mercy is the attribute by which man rises to share the holiness and be protected by the power of God. It modulates

the minor chant of the "still sad music of humanity," lost in sin and sorrow, and turns it into the triumphant melody of the new song of ransomed souls—"Salvation unto our God and to the Lamb."

The *Magnificat* is the *Marseillaise* both of a spiritual and a social democracy. Mary knows that her exaltation from the low estate of a slave girl (the literal meaning of the word rendered "handmaid") to be honored in the praises of all coming generations, that the choice of a country carpenter's bride to be the mother of the Messiah—that these are divine testimonies to the equal standing of all souls before the sovereignty of God.

But why does our democratic songstress use the past tense when she declares "He *hath* scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart, he *hath* deposed dynasts from their thrones"? Certainly, there is little reason for such grammatical explanations as that she spoke in Hebrew, using, as was common, its past tense in the future sense, nor that it is a Greek gnomic aorist used to describe the habitual. What is surely meant is that what has

already come into her own experience by the angelic annunciation and the Holy Spirit's presence is the seed of that coming kingdom whose full blossom and fruitage will be spiritual liberty, equality of human rights, and perfect fraternity of all souls. The incarnation of God in man is the necessary end of all autocracy in government and society.

It is not enough to claim that the democratic movement in history has come from our Lord's teaching of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Modern freedom is more than the fruitage of a mere didactic message. Its germ was actually sown in the person of Christ. By the incarnation of God in the form of a Jewish carpenter, a new picture of personal worth has come to all human thought; and by the atonement in which "he tasted death for every man," he has enabled all humble souls to dye their rags of serfdom in that purple flood of sacrificial love which transforms them into the robes of royalty. The divine democracy is not a Marxian socialism, leveling down to a proletariat standard,

but a lifting up of all life until all men may share with Christ his kingship.

The history of the world is still stirred by this Messianic revolution. Every Christmas day is a true Independence Day for all mankind. Thrones are still tottering at the touch of his scepter. When a stable and a carpenter shop are made the mansions of God's Anointed and a cross becomes his throne, all social selfishness and injustice, all business baseness and greed, all political despotism and cruelty, are doomed.

"Almighty God to all mankind on Christmas Day said he:
'I rent you from the old red hills, and rending made you free.
There was charter, there was challenge in a blast of breath I gave;
You can be all things other; you cannot be a slave.
You shall be tired and tolerant of fancies as they fade,
But if men doubt the charter, you shall call on the crusade—
Trumpet and torch and catapult, cannon and blow and blade,
Because it was my challenge to all the things I made.' "

Neither Mary nor her Son would have

indorsed all the teachings of these stirring lines by Gilbert Keith Chesterton. Jesus Christ will not enforce his Charter of Democracy by cannon or by sword. His kingdom cometh not by observation. The weapons of his holy warfare are not carnal but spiritual. Nor will its final victory be through political methods. Nothing but a birth from above opens the doors of his kingdom. The divine democracy will triumph by the entrance of Christ into human hearts, the transformation of life, and the supplanting of selfishness by the spirit of brotherhood. But although its source is spiritual its results will be external. A Christianity that is not applied is denied. Earthly kings must be deposed if the King of kings is to rule the world. The heaped-up gold of capitalistic greed must melt away in the fires of holy love and sacrificial service until poverty shall pass away. The rich must empty their purses if the hungry are to be filled with good things. Room, room in the seats of the noble for the sons of the lowly! for by the manger birth the poor man has become a king.

"Now Christ is Lord of heaven and hell,
And all the words of Christ are true.
He touched the cottage and it grew,
He touched the palace and it fell.

"But the sun streams in at the cottage door
That stands where once the palace stood,
And the workman, toiling to earn his food,
Was never a king before."[1]

Slaves have often been sweet singers—but there has always been a minor note of melancholy in their minstrelsy. Democracy and freedom have always been the real environment of music. Christ is the chorister who leads the anthem of freedom. He it is who comes to proclaim "liberty to the captive and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." In all human history the pilgrims toward the lands of liberty have burst forth into song at the moment of deliverance. The Israelites leaving behind them the submerged army of despotism face the wilderness of their freedom with the Song of Moses:

"Sound the loud timbrel over Egypt's dark sea.
Jehovah hath conquered, his people are free!"

[1] Mary Elizabeth Coleridge.

And our Pilgrim Fathers as their feet touched the wild wilderness of the New World did it with "hymns of lofty cheer."

"Amid the storms they sang,
And the stars heard and the sea;
And the sounding aisles of the dim woods rang
With the anthem of the free!"

We have called the *Magnificat* the madrigal of Mary. Really, it might be called her galliard. "My spirit doth *rejoice* in God my Saviour." The Greek word for "rejoice," *ἠγαλλίασε*, may be the root of that gay dance called the galliard. Her ancestor, David, danced before the ark of Jehovah. And now her inward spirit bounds in joy before that inward presence in her heart and life, "my Saviour." Saviour! did she sing her song in the vernacular tongue of Palestine, the Aramaic? If so, she spoke that word which the angel had given her as the name of the coming child. We may not find Christ in her song; there is a silence of the winged cherub so near the ark that it may not speak. But Christ is in the song for all that. That minor strain of dissonance which jarred the music of

her mind in Nazareth as she faced the shame of a virgin birth has now been resolved into a great major chord of holy rapture sung by the choir of her soul as thought, feeling and will leap and sing before the promised presence of the incarnate God. When Jesus comes into the heart a new song begins.

IV

THE SILENCED PRIEST—THE SECOND SINGER

ALL that was best in Judaism was the heritage of the Messiah and of his forerunner, the Baptist. Holy and happy homes were those in Nazareth and Hebron where Jesus and John spent their childhood. The royal lineage of David and the sacerdotal succession of Aaron were worthily represented in the blameless and unsullied lives of Joseph and Mary and of Zacharias and Elisabeth. The latter are pictured by Saint Luke as indeed a model pair; they were one in love and in the Lord. Their constant employment in sacred tasks had not made them irreverent; the sanctity of religious service was not staled to them by its commonness. Yet one grief clouded the gladness of this priestly household. Backward they can trace their Levitical pedigree to Aaron, but Providence has given

them no forward look; the reproach of childlessness, so abhorrent to the Hebrew heart, is upon the pious pair. It is always a calamity when the homes best fitted for the right nurture of childhood furnish neither citizens to the state nor members to the church.

We cannot doubt that this private and personal longing lent some coloring to the public ministry of Zacharias. When his turn comes to serve in the Holy Place, kindling the altar fires, trimming the sacred lamps, and swinging the smoking censer before the curtains of the Unseen Holy, his hungry longing burned with the flames, and his passionate desire mingled with the fragrance that went up to God.

A minister is the more qualified for his ministry by the sympathy with human need born of his own sorrow. Outside the people are praying and watching for the rising vapor cloud which shall float heavenward with their petitions; within the aged priest is wafting the odorous offering, made more fragrant by the perfume of his bruised spirit. And

so this day, God, by his angel, broke the silence of centuries with, "Fear not, Zacharias, thy prayer is answered."

We are acquainted with the names of but two of the great angels of the Presence, Michael, the messenger of judgment, and Gabriel, the angel of promise. Yet why should our modern Sadduceeism, so credulous of the scientific marvels wrought by "impersonal force" (is there such a thing?) lose the glory and blessing of the lesser wonder of our personal allies in the unseen realm? They still fill the air with their radiant beauty; they still help us with their holy ministries. Those that are "heirs of salvation" are still honored with seraphic service. Especially when we are doing God's business, as was this good priest in the Temple, attending to the sacred routine of worship, do we draw near the veil of mystery that hides the unseen world, and forth from the thick darkness of the Holiest shall come the big, bright messengers of grace. The carved twin cherubim that bend above the Mercy-Seat, trying to guess the secret of the sprinkled blood,

are but earthly pictures of the holy host that help in all true human worship. When we sing at the holy communion, "Therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven," surely our hearts feel that all the heavenly stairways are filled with shining ones bearing petitions up and bringing blessings down. If we could hear and see them, it is a marvelous tale they would tell, that our lives with their plans and purposes are known and regarded in heaven and that strong seraphs are given the care of our dearest interests. There is some symbolic truth in such a lovely legend as that of Sandalphon, the Angel of Prayer, of whom Longfellow sings:

"And he holdeth our prayers as he stands,
And they turn into flowers in his hands,
Into garlands of purple and red;
And in through the gates of the portal,
Through the streets of the city Immortal,
Is wafted the perfume they shed."

Do not marvel that the pious priest was astounded at the acceptance of the prayer of years. We are all like that, and sight would be more terrible to most

of us than faith. What amazement would come to many Christian congregations if their bold petitions were suddenly answered! It is not surprising that his fearful heart and bewildered reason called for a confirmation of the promise. God graciously gives him a sign. The transient dumbness imposed as a penalty for his hesitant faith was more than punishment; it was a pledge for the fulfillment of the promise. Under that seal of silence in the hushed chambers of his spirit, forever filled with the music of the messenger, he is beginning to shape that glorious anthem which shall break forth from his lips when the budding promise breaks into the flower of fulfillment.

The promise that the mute priest carries in his heart is the climax of the old covenant and the beginning of the new. The expected child shall close the priestly succession of Aaron and the prophetic line of Elijah. "He shall be great," says Gabriel, but, as we read the record, it is a strange greatness, a greatness of the desert wastes, of unworldly sacrifice, and of bloody martyrdom. His is no glory

like that of Herod, miscalled "the Great"; "he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall be filled with the Holy Spirit." Already new standards of worth are coming into the world, which the manger cradle shall confirm and make a permanent possession.

Out from the Holy Place comes the mute priest to dismiss the congregation; only by gestures can he convey the Levitical blessing. But though the liturgic benediction is hushed upon his lips, the *Benedictus* begins to burn within his soul.

V

THE *BENEDICTUS*—THE HYMN OF THE GOSPEL DAWN

THE *Benedictus*, sung by Zacharias as the birth-song of his son, John the Baptist, was the hymn of the gospel dawn. As in the myth of Memnon, the stony lips of the Egyptian deity murmured a strange, sweet melody at sunrise, so, when the rays of the Sun of Righteousness touched the dead lips of earth, they broke forth into music. After nine months of dumbness and suppression, the song which has been shaping itself in the hushed temple of his heart breaks forth like some pent-up mountain stream or like the sudden bursting of a flower bud with a "Bless the Lord!" and very soon the angels will respond "Glory!"

The *Benedictus* is characteristically a priestly song. As the *Magnificat* has a regal note, befitting a daughter of David's race, there is a sacerdotal strain in the

Benedictus, as is natural to a son of Aaron. It is set, however, to the key of a higher ritualism already instinctively foreshadowed by a seer of the ancient days as he sang, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." That gleam of the white raiment of a universal priesthood which had thus dawned in the days of old, now brightens into a loftier liturgy, as all life becomes worship, as a redeemed humanity shall "serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."

The *Benedictus* is also a family hymn. Probably if we had this Canticle in the original Aramaic, which was the native tongue of Zacharias, we should find the whole family of the forerunner lending their names to strike the chords of promise. Zacharias means "the memory of Jehovah"; John (Hananiah), "the mercy of Jehovah"; and Elisabeth, "the oath of God." The whole hymn condensed into a single sentence is this: God has remembered his oath of mercy. Blessed home at Hebron where the first three Canticles of the incarnation were sung

and where the very names sum up the great messages of Israel to the world and its sublime promise for the future.

The *Benedictus* is a father's hymn. Not only the priest but the father speaks. His paternal pride sees in his infant son one who shall be more than a mechanical priest, who shall rise to the higher dynamic function of the prophet. "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High." If the proud father sings about his child, it is because that son is to be the *avant-courier*, the harbinger of the dawn, the morning star that runs before the rising sun and is soon lost in his rays. As in an ocean voyage, we at last breathe the fragrance of a nearing shore, the bud of historic hope shall soon burst into the blossom of fulfillment. Although Zacharias is a priest, in this song he is inspired by a prophetic note. As the *Magnificat* of Mary echoes the psalmody of the Old Testament, the *Benedictus* of Zacharias echoes the prophetic sermons. In him the voice of Israel's hope again awakes, and it shall sound its last great call to righteousness

in the preaching of the boy whose birth it celebrates when his voice shall be heard crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." He shall stand on the margin of the golden gospel summer to which prophecy is the spring.

But the supreme strains of the song are about God. The Virgin's song circles about the throne, and magnifies the mighty and merciful King in his righteous sovereignty; but the priest's song brings God down to earth, the God of salvation.

The *Benedictus* adumbrates the God of redemption. Heaven stoops to earth; God visits man. It is not we who have climbed the skies and conquered heaven; it is God who knocks at our doors, bringing the gifts of his grace and the pledges of his immortal friendship. "He hath visited and redeemed his people." Redeemed! it means the slave set free, the exile restored to citizenship, the convict pardoned, the bankrupt released, the ransom paid. Zacharias did not see the cross, but in that word "redeemed" he dimly foreshadows its glory and its gloom. God visits earth, but he does not come empty-

handed; he brings the price of souls in hands that are pierced on the way.

Zacharias sings the faithfulness of God, which he himself had doubted as too good to be true. Israel is above all the nation of the covenant; it boldly dared to conceive God as placing himself under bonds to his own. The rainbow after the flood, pledge of the permanence of natural law, the rite of circumcision, the words of Sinai—these were some of the seals on the great contract that pledged the Eternal God to the service of humanity. And it was more than a contract for service; it was a bond of friendship, a seal of fellowship. The God of the Bible is the God of the Amen, the God of the oath, the God of promise. Will he keep faith? There are times when faith is hard, when our blind eyes do not discern him working in the affairs of men.

> "But right is right, since God is God,
> And right the day must win;
> To doubt would be disloyalty,
> To falter would be sin."[1]

If he is unfaithful, he loses more than

[1] Frederick William Faber.

we; he loses his character of truth, a possession worth more than all his worlds. The character of God is the highest pledge of stability in the universe. There is an old story that in the tent of Charles V a bird had built her nest, and when his army moved forward the emperor forbade its being disturbed until it had brooded its young. So has our God given his word that "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away." He is the Lord of Hosts, and may command his armies of stars to march on, but love may safely brood its young in the eaves of his tabernacle.

The *Benedictus* is the matin song of the coming day. Its closing strophe is a beautiful picture of a caravan lost in the darkness of the desert, to whom the breaking dawn discloses the path: "The dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

The glory of the ancient world was the glory of night with its splendor of stars and the changing radiance of the moon,

full of false and artificial lights and deceitful will-o'-the wisps. Now the world lies in the twilight of a new day, the gray of dawning is awaiting the glory of God, and the pilgrims of the night turn eager faces toward the East.

VI

THE DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH

THE *Benedictus* ends with that picture of a caravan in the desert. We can imagine it wrapped in the gloom of midnight, the wild beasts howling about the travelers, the waste winds wailing, and the road lost. They cannot go on, but, sitting, wait for the day. At last dawn breaks on the desert and reveals the path. This is the last word of the prophecy of the old dispensation. It takes up the old-time message of hope; it is the cry of the watchman—"The morning cometh!" In the *Benedictus* the Old Testament and the New meet, prophecy is passing into fulfillment. "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand."

Night is a true picture of the world without Christ. Its darkness is a symbol of doubt and despair. Like those children who formerly were born and brought up in the mines, and never saw the sun

or plucked a flower, are the wanderers in pre-Christian deserts. Like those children, they may have been told about the sun—that it looks like a safety-lamp; but what do they know of the glory and beauty of the star of day?

Night is filled not only with gloom but with terror. It is entirely natural to be afraid in the dark. Night is the time of mists that shroud and miasma that poisons; in it foul things come out, ghostly bats cleave the air, and ill-omened owls hoot in the darkness; then savage beasts prowl from their lairs and unclean hyenas skulk among the tombs; then walk forth the pestilence and all the most horrid forms of vice; then bestiality reels through the streets; then is heard the infant's wail, and wives and mothers timorously listen for the coming of unsteady steps; then from upper chambers come the rattle of dice and the silly laughter of the debauchee; it is then that wicked conspiracies are hatched and cruel revenges are plotted. Night is the harvest time of ignorance and sin, of disease and death. Night robs the world of its beauty;

the brightest sky becomes leaden, the greenest landscape is a waste, the rose is bereft of its redness, and its loveliness is lost to the lily.

Such was the moral darkness of the world before the Advent. "Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people." Never was the world's gloom denser. Rome was filled with religious experiments; Greece had more gods than men, and in despair had named an altar to the Unknown God. Nature had no answers to the passionate questionings of man as to God and immortality. Life was anguish and death was terror. The wheels of life stood still; the way was lost in the dark; there was nothing to do but to sit down and wait for the dawn of the day. It is even so now in individual life before He comes. Many a soul is blind in the very land of sunshine, like Milton's Samson.

> "O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse,
> And with no hope of day."

Who has not longed for the day? "My soul waiteth for God more than they that

watch for the morning." The sailor clinging to the shrouds through the driving storm, the soldier lying wounded on the battlefield, the lonely night watcher beside the sick bed, the fevered patient himself tossing with restlessness, the benighted wanderer in the forest or on the lonely moor—how often they cry—"Would God it were morning!" Imagination peoples the obscurity with forms of terror. Did you ever suffer from insomnia? Then you have learned that "truly the light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun."

The world's night is not wholly dark. It has stars in it and long reaches of silver moonlight. It is often filled with strange dreams of beauty and its nightingales fill the dark hours with song, "smoothing the raven wing of darkness till it smiled." There was a pre-Christian revelation. Its stars came out one by one, until the whole sky was spangled with oracles proclaiming the advancing splendor of a coming dawn. The whole note of the ancient world is longing, with here and there a gleam of light.

Spurgeon somewhere in a sermon pictures a family at Christmas time, expecting an elder brother who is absent to arrive by a midnight train. The other children beg to be allowed to sit up to meet him. "No," the father answers, "you shall see him in the morning." So the prophets longed to see our Elder Brother, Jesus, but were compelled, one by one, to lie down in the cold bed of death. David cried, "Let me see this son of mine who is greater than Solomon." Job implored, "Let me look upon the face of my Living Redeemer." Malachi beseeches, "Father, I am the last one up, let me wait and behold the Sun of Righteousness." And then two aged saints in the Temple say, "We have studied the time-tables; the train is almost in; let us behold the Consolation of Israel." And the Father granted their request, and Simeon cried: "Let now thy servant depart in peace."

The *Benedictus* discloses the source of light—"the mercy of the heart of our Lord." The common dayspring blushes in the east, pillowing its chin upon the

Orient wave. God's dawn breaks out of his heart. "God is light"—this is the message of the gospel—"in him is no darkness at all." What wonder that the highest form of heathenism is sun-worship? The ancient Thracians had a strange symbol—a sun with three rays—one falling on ice and melting it, one on rock and fusing it, and one on a dead man, bringing him back to life. All earthly light has been kindled from his heart, and his city "hath no need of the sun."

Light is therefore the child of love. Salvation is born out of the heart of God; it comes from the inmost of his being. His wisdom may direct it, his power perform it, but in his heart it was born. Love is not blind; it has the clearest of all vision. How *heartily* God loves! The first word of creation came out of God's very heart, "Let there be light." He has not stopped saying it, and will not until all chaos is conquered and all darkness dispelled.

So light is the gentlest of forces, yet the mightiest. It falls so gently that it does not crush the petals of a rose nor hurt

the eyelids of a sleeping babe, yet it builds the forest and commands the tides. Not alone in the thundering pomp of fiery law is God revealed but in the tender mercy of the gospel dawn.

"The people that sit in darkness have seen a great light." In the Genesis poem of creation, when the world was four days old, God centralized the primeval light into the sun, moon, and stars. So, when the Adamic race had passed four thousand years, he took the light of patriarch and prophet, of saint and sage, and poured its full radiance into the life of Jesus of Nazareth, who proclaims, "I am the light of the world."

Sunshine is a daily victory. City-dwellers rarely see the sunrise, unless they belong to the tin-pail brigade. The day begins its work before most of us. The gray grows to gold, the mountains first surrender, kindled with the altar fires of morning worship, and then the widening splendor at last wraps the whole world with robes of light. Our Lord, the Sun of Righteousness, is, like the day, the true revealer. It is the sun that makes a dial

show the time of day. You cannot interpret a dial by the gleam of stars or moon, or by gas or the electric blaze. So it is Jesus, and not philosophers or sages, that can interpret life. Not all at once—we have a great Christ whose glory grows with the ages; the Christ of to-day is larger in the world's vision than the dawn that broke on the prophet's vision or the shepherd's eyes. He is the only source of perfect light.

"The night has a thousand eyes
And the day but one;
Yet the light of the bright world dies
With the dying sun.

"The mind has a thousand eyes,
The heart but one;
Yet the light of a whole life dies
When Love is done."[1]

Day brings joy. The Hyperborean watchers of Arctic climes dress themselves in festal garments and climb the hills to greet the returning light, crying, "Behold the sun!" So does the world feel the approaching joy of the Christmastide. The night of sin and sorrow is past. Thus

[1] F. W. Bourdillon.

the morning is God's daily preacher of hope. The herald angel proclaimed: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."

Still the *Benedictus* sings its blessed music of a holy hope to those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. "Arise, shine, for thy light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Saint Paul afterward sang a little morning hymn to arouse dead souls:

> "Awake, thou that sleepest.
> Arise from thy deadness,
> And Christ shall shine on thee."

VII

THE ANGEL'S SERMON BEFORE THE ANGELIC ANTHEM

O LITTLE town of Bethlehem! It was indeed a little town, "least among the thousands of Israel," but it was one of the most ancient and illustrious villages in Palestine. It is crowded with many noble memories. Near it stands what is affirmed to be the tomb of Rachel, the fair mother of Joseph and Benjamin. Here in these fertile fields about it, many centuries before, Ruth, the Moabite maiden, gleaned liberal handfuls of golden grain left by the reapers of Boaz. And here, a millennium before, the ruddy grandson of Ruth, David, had kept his father's sheep, protecting them from the wolf, the lion, and the bear.

Wheat fields and pastures! The word "Bethlehem" means the "House of Bread," and here at last the Bread of Life comes down from heaven. Near it was the Tower of the Flock where were kept the

sheep destined for the Temple offerings at Jerusalem, and here is born the Lamb of God who at the Sacred City shall be sacrificed "for the sin of the world." Luke speaks of it as the "City of David"; but that name is also given to Jerusalem, six miles away. He was not born in that great city, but in the little town; not in a palace on Mount Zion, but in the lowly manger of that caravansary at Bethlehem, which was probably the ancient inn of Chimham, son of Barzillai, the servant of David. The little Bethlehem becomes the birthplace of joy and Jerusalem the scene of tragedy.

> "Sing Bethlehem! Sing Bethlehem!
> Ye daughters of Jerusalem;
> Keep sorrow for Gethsemane
> And mourning for Mount Calvary.[1]

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not." The citizens of his own town disown him; "there was no room for him at the inn." The heavenly sermon and song came not to the town-dwellers, but to shepherds who kept the flocks in the fields near-by. They were

[1] Lionel Johnson.

in the place of duty. Idle souls do not see visions. These pastoral folk were not even playing harps at a sacred concert or painting pottery for a synagogue fair; God sent his concert to them at their work. To them came the heavenly glory, an angelic preacher, and a heavenly chorus.

We do not know the name of this seraphic sermonizer. It may have been Gabriel, the messenger that brought the glad promise to Zacharias and Mary. Or, as it was a "multitude of heavenly soldiers" who sang the anthem after the sermon, it may have been Michael, the generalissimo of the armies of the skies who came at their head to pronounce the recitative that preceded their chorus. He is simply described as the "angel of the Lord."

This angelical message is evangelical—it is a proclamation of good news. For joy is not the sole note of celestial messages. They have come again and again with tearful tidings, with denunciations of doom, and they sound the terrible trumpets of judgment. But no minor modula-

tions mar this message. It proclaims joy to the shepherds—a joy that widens into joy to the world. Shepherds do rejoice when a lamb is born, and the whole world should sing *Jubilates* when they "behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

Does blinding glory bring terror? Out of the dazzling radiance the seraphic preacher speaks his exordium, "Fear not!" This was the prelude to every Advent message. Fear not! Zacharias, thou trembling priest in the temple. Fear not! Holy Virgin in thy humble home. Fear not! lowly shepherds guarding your flocks in the chill winter night. All fear is turned into joy by the Advent of our Lord. All royal birthdays are festal days, and this birthday brings joy from the land of joy, joy from the joyful heart of a happy God.

The sermon announces a Saviour, and that is what a lost world needs. *Soter*, *Christos*, *Kurios*—"Saviour, Christ, Lord." Saviour! as the angel doubtless spoke in Aramaic, the current speech of Judæa, which the shepherds could understand, the

word which he used would be Jesus, the personal name of the newborn infant. Christ! the delivering King of Hebrew hope, the Anointed One who shall become King of kings and Lord of lords. Lord! the substitute name given Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, whose sacred name it was irreverent to pronounce. And so this angelic sermon is doctrinal—its divinity including both Christology and soteriology.

The sermon discloses a sign. The divine Messiah of his doctrine is revealed in a helpless babe. The incarnation is a veiling of the Divine. It is an infant that they will find. "Infant" is a strange term, derived from the Latin *infans*, meaning "speechless." The Eternal Word appears without a word! He silently steals into the life of humanity. Yet the sign is seen not merely in the baby form but in his surroundings. Where shall the shepherds seek and find him? Not in a palace but a stable, not in a royal mansion but a village barn, not in a silk-lined cradle but a straw-lined crib. He shall not be known by any earthly badge

of glittering gems, shall bear no heraldic crest, shall not be robed in a purple mantle of princely pomp, shall lie in no cradle of ivory. God's sign of greatness goes past these marks of rank, and chooses the peasant garb. He becomes one of us. Swaddling bands still bind the babies of the Orient. They were used everywhere in Europe until Jean Jacques Rousseau, in his educational novel *Emile*, condemned the custom.

What does it all mean—this sign? It means what the Nicene Creed announces. *He was made man.* As the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "Truly not of angels doth he take hold; he taketh hold of the seed of Abraham." And the angel preacher and the angel singers did not disdain this act, that he assumed not angelic but human form. "God manifest in the flesh" was "seen of angels," and longing to penetrate the great mystery of godliness, they look with wonder on the scene. He is not one of *them*, but the seraphic speaker must congratulate the human kinsmen of the Christ—"Unto *you* a child is born"; and the celestial choir

make majestic melody over the astounding revelation of God's good will to man.

Perplexed mortals find intellectual difficulties in the doctrine of the Deity of Christ, but wondering angels stand in rapturous adoration before the astounding fact of his humanity. Paganism is full of apotheoses, of mortals exalted to deified positions. Christianity alone reveals the One Eternal God humbling himself to take the form of human flesh. The God of the New Testament does not regard crowns, thrones, scepters, starry splendors, celestial *glorias* as the true signs of divine value. He will not grasp them; rather does he empty himself of this transcendent glory and takes the form of a servant, and is found in fashion as a man. God's sign of greatness is not the skyey portent for which the Jews sought; it is, rather, the swaddling clothes and the manger. Not by bees that come bringing honey for his lips, not by strangled serpents about his cradle, not by a shining aura about him as Correggio paints in his Holy Night, were the shepherds to identify him as Saviour, Christ, Lord!

Real greatness is more than bigness. God gives his measure of the highest values by entering the world through a stable door and leaving it by a grave. Love, which is the greatest thing in the world, is revealed at its highest through sacrifice. And the sacrifice of Jesus begins with his birth. As Dorner said, "Love is the power of God over his own omnipotence."

"This shall be the sign!" Some blazing meteor may reveal the newborn King to wealthy Wise Men from the East, but the pledge given to humble shepherds by the angelic preacher is a peasant babe wrapped in swaddling bands and lying in a manger. This is God's "good tidings of great joy" to all the common folk of earth.

VIII

"GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY"

ALL was silent in the world of nature, and all was indifferent in the world of man. No convulsion of nature or history marked the greatest birth of time. But heaven was all astir and the armies of the sky cannot contain their joy. Of all the dwellers on earth a few humble shepherds alone see the glory-light and are permitted to join in the gladness of the celestial world. It was on historic ground where a thousand years before David had kept his father's sheep, and near the tower of the flock, where were kept those designed for the Temple offerings, that the Shekinah, long withdrawn from Israel, reappears. It had flashed like a brand of fire at the closed gates of Eden, it had blazed in the unconsumed bush before the astonished gaze of Moses, it had glowed through the gloom of the nights in the desert to guide the

advancing hosts of Israel, it had flung a luminous cloud between the cherubim above the ark of the covenant, it had filled the Holiest Place in the Temple of Solomon with its dazzling radiance; but for five hundred years it had vanished, and now again its splendor bursts on the plains of Bethlehem. It was not a waste of glory to brighten the sky with angels and pour down from the steeps of the heavenly Zion cataracts of tumultuous song. For this event, so unnoted in all secular chronicle, is the watershed of human history from which the streams of time flow backward toward the dark; from whence the rivers of the future flow forward to swell the ocean of eternal light.

Fear was turned into joy by the advent of our Lord. To Zacharias, to Mary, to the shepherds, the angel brings one message, "Fear not." The pagan world was joyless, with a constant undertone of sadness beneath its merriest songs: this had come to its climax at the period of the coming of the Christ. The experiments of nature and of philosophy had failed. The politicians of Rome and the philosophers

of Greece were alike impotent to answer human need.

> "On that hard pagan world disgust
> And secret loathing fell;
> Deep weariness and sated lust
> Made human life a hell."[1]

Man was like a harp unstrung, giving back to every touch only harsh discords, but the greater Son of the great harper, David, came to restring the harp of human life and restore its lost harmonies.

Christianity is a religion of joy. It was good news to the slave, to the workman, to the child. It began with a song out of the sky and earth soon began to vibrate in sympathy with the angelic music. Barbarism with its cruelty melts away, chains snap, dungeons crumble, fetters fall, tyrannies topple. It would be a mistake to say that there was no joy in the world before he came; there were the beauty of the sky, earth, and sea, the laughter of little children, and the dear delights of love. But he took away the bitter drop of despair that poisoned these cups of

[1] Matthew Arnold.

rapture and added the new ecstasy born of his own heart of love.

The Advent reveals God in a joy-giving way. God made flesh—that is the sovereign remedy for the world's fear. There was an older revelation of God; it was on a burning mountain, amid pealing thunders and thrilling trumpets, and in an awful voice that spoke solemn words of law. Even Moses, who was allowed to enter the supernal splendor, said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." But Jesus reveals the *Father;* that name was perpetually upon his lips, and its meanings constantly unfolded in his life. When he speaks from a mountain it is not in tones of thunder that terrify, but to say, "Blessed, blessed, blessed!"

The Advent reveals man in a joy-giving way. We do not judge a tree by the blighted trunk and blasted leaves, but by the full glory of foliage, flower, and fruit. So we do not really see the full possibilities of our manhood in the wreckage wrought by sin, but in the face of Jesus Christ. At last we see of what man is capable and what he may become.

Man has received God; he has intempled the Infinite. God became the Son of man, that man might become the child of God. What wonder that the redemption song resumes the gladness of the creation chorus, for it consummates creation. The Babe of Bethlehem discloses the full import of the primitive revelation, that man was made in the image of God.

The joy of the Advent is unique, for it manifests the true glory of God. It is a strange contrast, the scene so simple and the song so sublime. Outside, the blazing Shekinah and the burst of song—inside, the lowly manger and the helpless Babe. The angels know better than we what constitutes true greatness. Man finds glory in climbing up, but God in coming down. The incarnation is the riddle of reason, but religion finds more of God in the Man of Sorrows than in all the splendor of opened heavens. Love is more royal than power; sacrifice is more sovereign than wisdom. He came to us by a stable door, he left by the gateway of a grave. This is the true glory of the incarnation, the true "joy to the world."

IX

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

IN the operas of Richard Wagner one of the interesting characteristics is what is called the *leit-motiv*, a musical phrase which appears again and again as the person or position it represents reappears in the drama. So in that divine symphony of the universe, of which God is author, the creative motive, uttered when the jubilant shouting of the angels of God joined to the singing of the morning stars, is again heard with fresh variations, as the first creation passes into the new creation and nature blossoms into grace.

One can hardly understand why they had been silent so long—so soon was that primeval anthem silenced by the sad story of sin. Then comes a long hour of hushed hallelujahs and a strange twilight of revelation. But now the fault of the first Adam, with its sad heredity

of evil, is met by the birth of the second Adam, the first of a new race of the sons of God, and the angels sing again. That ancient chant of creation, checked by the gleam of fiery swords barring the way to a lost paradise, becomes the incarnation hymn, bursting the open gates of paradise restored. Heaven and earth join in the great oratorio. That strange earthly quartet, the priest and his wife, the Virgin Mother and the aged saint, sing their parts while above them from the sky galleries comes the celestial chorus.

If we only knew the score of that seraphic song! Did not the shepherds hum it on their homeward way as they sang their own *glorias?* May not some strains of it still linger, unrecognized, in the minstrelsy of the church? Surely much of our highest and holiest melodies have come down to us from heaven.

What holidays do they keep in heaven? There are two earthly festivals to which they sent delegates—Christmas and Easter day. Beside our visible world there is an unseen world that thinks in sympathy with ours. Heaven sends special trains to

all the great spiritual events of human history. For earth is the school of angels. The principalities and powers in heavenly places are supremely interested in the mystery of redemption. "Which things the angels longed to look into." Even the stars are sympathetic, and a new radiance starts out of the darkness to grace the scene of His nativity. The shining ranks of the heavenly host stand entranced before earth's highest fact, and descend to adore the newborn King. When he bringeth his First-Begotten into the world he saith, "Let all the angels of God worship him!"

The *Gloria in Excelsis* brings heaven and earth together in a dual song. It has two notes—Glory and Peace. The angels keep in mind the heaven from which they come and the earth to which they sing. They send a strain both to God and man. Long ago the psalmist had a hint of this celestial and terrestrial duet: "Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad."

The *Gloria in Excelsis*, like the Incarnate One it celebrates, is both divine

and human. It lifts a praise to the skies and floats a blessing down to earth. It celebrates the twin fruits of redemption, a higher glory to God and a richer gladness for man. For the incarnation itself is the union of God and man, the marriage of heaven and earth. The Son of man is the heavenly ladder by which the angels travel up and down, and by him glory goes upward to God and peace comes down to man. Let us study these two entwined strains of sacred song in which the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus* are so blended.

Glory to God! this is the first and last note of every true hymn. In the Eucharistic Hymn this canticle has been worked out in greater fullness: "We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee, we give thanks to thee for thy great glory." And we give a new climax to the praise of the ancient psalmody, by the *Gloria Patri*, a doxology to the Holy Trinity. It is the recurring motive in the universal song of nature and history. God is glorified in all things. Stars write the shining splendor of his name against

the blue vault of the sky, and flowers the beauty of his character on the green plains of earth. The heavens declare the glory of his power, and earth reveals his creative wisdom.

No verb appears either in the Greek or English version of this anthem. Did they mean "All glory is to God" or "Let glory be to God"? Certainly both, it is both assertion and command. The angels not only sing God's glory but they invite our songs. They stand ready to assist our praise and present it perfect before God. All religious worship is union with the celestial choirs. "Therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we laud and magnify thy glorious name, evermore praising thee and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts! Heaven and earth are full of thy glory; glory be to thee, O God most high!" The angelic songsters are a heavenly megaphone which, taking our feeblest adoration and catching the faintest ripple of our poor praise, swells them into majestic symphonies of glory and bears them to the highest places. Edward Perronet, who

wrote that noble hymn, "All hail the power of Jesus' name!" whispered with his dying breath, "Glory to God in the heights of his divinity, glory to God in the depths of his humanity, glory to God in his all sufficiency!" Surely, that failing mortal breath stirred the air of heaven with a full strain of devotion.

Already we have noted that the angels began to sing when they heard the seraphic preacher name the sign of the swaddling clothes and the manger. "Manger" was the last word of the sermon and "glory" the first word of the song. Heaven comes down to earth to create a new sort of glory—a beauty not of blazing splendors but of a lowly birth. Read further on in the Gospel and you shall find the song only a prelude to sorrow, the preface to the cross. The meanness of the crib between the ox and the ass becomes the scandal of the cross between two thieves. The angels differ from worldlings in their concept of glory. They do not see it alone in the beauty of form and color, the splendor of stars, the flashing of jewels, and the pomp of kings. There is a moral beauty

born of love and revealed in sacrifice and service to which earthly vision is often blind, but which spiritual sight can see. John says, "We beheld his glory," but defines it, not as power and wisdom, but as grace and truth. Love is more splendid than power, for it is moral power that shall subdue all the might of matter. Sacrifice is more glorious than wisdom, for it is the divine secret that shall solve all the problems of life. Paul found the object of his glorying in the cross. It is the descent of our God down the long stairs of humiliation and pain that starts the shout of glory that mounts to the highest heavens. Somewhere an Anglican divine says quaintly, "He that came in clouts shall come again in clouds."

PEACE ON EARTH! Glory has too often been a military dream, but we dare not divorce God's glory from earth's peace. Yet the marvel of it is that it is a celestial army that comes singing peace. John Wiclif gave us a literal translation of the text when he describes the angelic chorus as "a multitude of heavenly *soldiers*." The hosts of heaven fight for peace, not

with carnal weapons but with the holy harmony of law, the sword of truth, and the divine dynamite of love. "The Son of God goes forth to war," not to kill and destroy, but to save and redeem. He himself is the first victim of his holy war against sin and death.

Peace on earth! was it assertion, prayer, or prophecy? Doubtless it was all three. For there was a strange peace on earth at that moment. For the third time in seven hundred years the gates of the temple of Janus at Rome were closed—a symbol of the great Augustan peace.

"No war or battle sound
Was heard the world around;
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;
The hooked chariot stood,
Unstained with hostile blood,
The trumpet spoke not to the armed throng;
And kings sat still with watchful eye
As if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was by.

"But peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the earth began;
The winds, with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kissed,
Whispering new joys to the mild ocean;

Who now hath quite forgot to rave,[1]
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave."

There was peace upon the earth, but it was not the peace of God. It was a Roman peace, the peace of power and conquest.

Peace was the prayer and prophecy of the angels, but they are not yet fulfilled. It sounds like a cynical sarcasm when we think of two thousand years of carnage and slaughter. The soil of earth is still soaked with blood, and nations, miscalled Christian, still load it with vast armaments of destruction.

"Strange prophecy! if all the screams
Of all the men that since have died
To realize war's kingly dreams
Had risen at once in one vast tide,
The choral voice of that vast multitude
Had been o'erpowered and lost amid the uproar rude."

In the last decade we have seen four Christmases, not white, but crimson with the most hellish slaughter of all time.

But international war is not the worst

[1] John Milton.

violation of this song of peace. What a satire on the mission of our Lord is church history with its theological hates and cruel persecutions! Worse still are our personal hates and private wars of selfishness and greed. How human life still jars and spoils the music of heaven! We have only sung half the hymn, the glory in the highest; and that half is a poor bit of praise until we let the full heavenly chorus fill our hearts with the heavenly peace. For heaven's peace shall bring a new glory to earth and peace on earth waft a greater glory to the skies.

But personal peace does come to the soul that learns from the Incarnate One to trust the Father's will. Peace is to the men of peace, the men of good will. Peace! where is it? not in valleys or on mountain tops, not in palaces of power nor on the thrones of kings. But real peace does dwell in hearts that know the holy hush of harmony with heaven. It is not a far-off song, but an inward experience. Through all life's tumult we may bear a present heaven in the heart.

Shall angels sing and men be silent?

Can Gabriel and Michael, who cannot know the full gladness of redemption, say "Glory to God!" like the redeemed soul? Sweeter than seraph's song is the shout of the saint.

Peace did come on Christmas day, it is coming now, and some day the divine harmony of God's music which is Jesus Christ shall drown out all earth's discords. This motive, creative and redemptive, sounds high above all the dissonances of life earth, and one day shall be woven into every strain of life.

"Blow, bugles of battle, the marches of peace;
East, west, north, and south let the long quarrel cease;
Sing the song of great joy that the angels began,
Sing of glory to God and of goodwill to man!
Hark! joining in chorus
The heavens bend o'er us!
The dark night is ending and dawn has begun;
Rise, hope of the ages, arise like the sun;
All speech flow to music, all hearts beat as one!"[2]

In the Middle Ages they fought so much that it became necessary to agree upon a rest from fighting four days in every week, from Wednesday night until Monday

[2] John Greenleaf Whittier.

morning, which was called the "Truce of God." And in our time the nations are planning at Washington and Genoa for a ten years' holiday from war. It is a good thing to do, but is a poor scrap from the divine program of universal and perpetual peace. And that shall come, as Isaiah and Micah prophesied, "for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken it!" The angels have gone away into heaven, even as a lark vanishes in the upper air, but still the song of the unseen host, with its heavenly vision of glory and its earthly promise of peace, broods over the discords of the ages. One day a rebellious world, defiant of God and belligerent toward men, shall be loyal and loving. The Kingdom shall come when the will of earth surrenders to that of heaven.

"Babe of a thousand birthdays, we that are young yet gray,
White with the centuries, still can find no better thing to say,
We that with sects and whims and wars have wasted Christmas Day.

"Light thou thy censer to thyself, for all our fires are dim,

Stamp thou thine image on our coin, for Cæsar's face grows grim
And a dumb devil of pride and greed has taken hold of him.

"We bring thee back great Christendom, churches, and towns and towers,
And if our hands are glad, O God, to cast them down like flowers,
'Tis not that they enrich thine hands, but they are saved from ours."[3]

In this chaos of confusion and unrest that has followed the World War, in which the twin dragons of Reaction and Revolution are struggling for mastery, let the Church of Christ arise to hush the clamor of selfishness and cruel din of militarism, that the world may again hear the angels sing.

[3] Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

X

NAMING THE CHILD—A NEW YEAR'S MEDITATION

BY what name shall we call the child? Many are quite careless in naming the baby, for a name may become a blessing or a burden. It should have dignity, euphony, and significance. It may be true that "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," but does not the word "rose" sound more sweetly to the ear than the word "cabbage"? We are not surprised, therefore, that when the supreme birth of all time came even noble parents as Joseph and Mary were not allowed to choose his name, but heaven announced it even before his conception to each of them separately.

The Bible everywhere places great emphasis upon names, for in the Hebrew psychology a name was more than a conventional distinction, it was a picture of personality. A crisis in life and character

brought a change of name: Abram becomes Abraham; Jacob the supplanter becomes Israel, a prince of God; Simon becomes Peter, the rock; and Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the missionary. So names are more than external badges; they stand for inner attributes of the human spirit.

The Holy Scriptures give us many names of God, marking the progressive revelation of his nature to man. In Genesis we see his power in the name *El Shaddai*, "the Almighty"; in Exodus his providence in the sacred *Tetragrammaton*, "Jehovah"; Isaiah shows us his moral character as the Holy One of Israel. And still the world waited for another word, and Jesus taught us to say "Our Father." What name will best fit him who is both God and man?

New Year's Day, one week after Christmas, is the Feast of the Circumcision, the anniversary of that day when He who was to do away with the law became a son of the law, by that historic rite which corresponds to Christian baptism, in which we to-day name our children.

What name shall He bear? what word

shall go down to history to be enshrined in human hearts, borne aloft in human prayers and tuned to melody in human songs? "And when the eight days were fulfilled for circumcising him, his name was called *Jesus*, which was so called by the angel before he was conceived." It was not an uncommon name for Jewish children; he must not be separated from mankind by some ingenious invention of a unique title. There are not less than three in Holy Writ who bore it, chief of whom was Joshua, the great successor of Moses. When the "Prince of Jehovah's host" appeared to Joshua in his vision may not that captain of the unseen army have been one with him who coming in human flesh took as his human name that of the great Hebrew commander? For the true successor to Moses, by whom the law was given, is not Joshua the son of Nun, who conquered Canaan, but *Jehoshua ben Miriam*, Jesus the son of Mary, in whom the Gospel came that shall conquer the world.

Jesus is a *personal* name. The highest use of a name is to mark individuality.

The Bible gives him other names. He is the Shiloh of Jacob's deathbed song, the Branch of Jeremiah's dream, the Prince of the Four Names in Isaiah's prophecy. And he calls himself by other names. He is Son of David, Son of man, the Way, Truth, and Life, the Good Shepherd, and the Apocalypse loves to call him the Lamb.

There is only one other word that can rival the name of "Jesus" in common use, he is frequently called the Christ. But, like the names above mentioned, it is the title of an office. Christ is simply the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word Messiah, the Anointed One, the title given to the promised delivering King of Israel by psalmist and prophet.

Shall we call him Jesus or Christ? Of course it is proper to call him either or both, but the personal name brings a closer sense of fellowship than an official title. Do we have a dear friend who holds a high office? and do we call him president, governor, mayor, general? Is he not nearer in that personal name by which we have known him since we were boys together? So the name "Jesus"

is repeated more than ten times as often in the four Gospels as the title "Christ." It was by this name that his mother called him from his play in the fields and his work in the shop at Nazareth; by this name the twelve apostles knew him; and "this same Jesus" the angels of the ascension call him as he sweeps by cloud chariots to his native home.

This human name, given in his humiliation, identifies him with us. It has become a divine name, borne by the King of kings and the Judge of all mankind. And it always was a divine name, divinely ordered, hinted in prophecy, and announced by angelic messengers to his earthly parents. Are we not right in assuming that not man alone, not even the blessed Virgin herself, could be trusted to find out a name for this wonderful child? His Father purposes to call him by that name which shall suggest the shining forth of that attribute of mercy concealed in the old divine titles, and now shining forth in splendor from his sweet human name.

Jesus is also a name of Power. Its

literal meaning is "Jehovah is Salvation." "His name shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." He saves! This is the testimony of faith, the experience of love, and the thrill of hope—and every time we say it we speak a bit of his name.

He alone saves: "There is no other name given among men by which they may be saved." Read the many references to "the Name" in the Acts of the Apostles, and we shall learn that Jesus, and not his word, his ordinances, nor his church, can redeem and deliver the world. This is the one thing that separates Christianity from all other religions; it centers in a personal Saviour. Confucianism is an ethic, Buddhism a philosophy, but Jesus Christ is salvation.

He saves from sin; not from wrath only, nor from poverty, disease, pain or death, but first and foremost from sin and therefore, finally, from all other woes. This name of "Saviour" has a growing meaning. "In His Name" has been wrought out every great deliverance of history; and the other great names—Paul, Augustine,

Luther, Wesley—are great only because he made them so. "His name shall continue so long as the sun and moon endureth." All other names, even those dear ones of father, mother, friends, are lost in this "name which is above every name." It is highest in the eternal hall of fame, above poets, philosophers, conquerors, or statesmen. All stars grow pale before this Morning Star. It is the one supreme name that time carries forth into eternity.

Jesus is a precious name. As Saint Bernard said, "it is honey in the mouth, harmony in the ear, melody in the heart, and joy in the life."

> "There is no name so sweet on earth,
> No name so dear in heaven,
> The name before his wondrous birth
> To Christ our Saviour given."

It is a name of real beauty—two musical syllables, especially as in other tongues than ours they preserve more of its ancient cadence by saying *Yesu*. The child speaks it without effort, and "'tis music in the sinner's ears." A freed woman who was learning to read, after wrestling with the alphabet, asked first to be taught

the name of Jesus, for, she said, "after that all the rest will be easier."

"Sweetest note in seraph song,
Sweetest name on mortal tongue,
Sweetest carol ever sung,
Jesus, Jesus, flow along."

Jesus! it is the watchword of every New Year. It is the holy magic by which we open the gates of divine power. "For Jesus' sake"—this is the penitent's plea; "in His name"—that is the Christian's law of life.

We all possess two names; one a family name which points to an earthly parentage and kinship, the other, received in holy baptism, we call our Christian name, symbol of a new heredity from a heavenly Father and a new kinship in the spiritual family of our Lord.

Our Christ is not unchristened; we do not have an anonymous Lord. His divine name in prophecy is Immanuel, "God with us," his human name in history is Jesus, the Saviour. So earth by its human prophet proclaims his divinity and heaven by its angelic messenger discloses his humanity.

The year ends with the birth and begins with the naming of our Lord. Let his be the one Name of names with which we praise the past and welcome the coming year. He is our Child, the gift of God and the heir of humankind. His name should be written in every family record as our own.

"Given, not lent,
And not withdrawn once sent,
This Infant of mankind, this One,
Is still the little welcome Son.

"New every year,
Newborn and newly dear,
He comes with tidings and a song
The ages long, the ages long."[1]

[1] Alice Meynell.

XI

THE PROPHETIC PRINCE OF THE FOUR NAMES

WE celebrate at Christmas the greatest birthday of all time, but it is more than that, it is above all a birthday in our own family, a source of personal joy. Its message is both universal and individual.

"Unto *you* a child is born," sang the herald, and that is all an angel could say, for the whitest-winged seraph could have no such interest in the incarnation as do we, and yet the angels were glad to sing *glorias* over our good news. But "not to angels did he take hold"; he did not become an angel, he became a man, and therefore the prophet Isaiah, being himself a man, proclaims "Unto *us* a child is born."

So did this joy send its glory back seven hundred years and made musical the language of saints and seers. One wonders

if that prophetic message in the ninth chapter of Isaiah does not unconsciously reveal a double birth in its Hebrew parallelism. "Unto us a child is *born*." That is the earthly fact of human parentage; "Unto us a son is *given*." That is the heavenly act of the Eternal Father.

How shall God come to earth? Men have dreamed strange dreams of his appearing, sky signs of splendor, pomp of fiery chariots, salvos of thunders, banners of fire, careering comets, etc. But his most princely path of approach was by the gateway of a lowly birth.

What name shall we give to this Child of us all? Many significant titles have been assigned to him: Immanuel, God with us, Christ the Anointed One, Jesus the Saviour. But none are fuller of meaning than the four great prophetic names of Isaiah 9. 6.

1. *Wonderful Counselor.* The prophet proclaims a prophet. Isaiah, himself a statesman and the wise counselor of kings, foretells the most marvelous statesman of all history. "Master," "Teacher," such his disciples called him, and the

multitude that heard him were astonished at his teaching, for here was a philosopher beside whose sayings all thought grows foolish, a poet whose creations transcend all art, a statesman who alone can carry permanent dominion upon his shoulder.

"He spake as never man spake," from the first words of wisdom that "Mary treasured in her heart" to the last divine promise that transformed the old despair into undying hope, "Lo, I am with you always." His method as teacher is "wonderful"; it is the voice of immediate vision; he stands in the unsullied radiance of unclouded Truth; he speaks as one having authority, an authority that never reasons, argues, or doubts, but possesses the absolute compulsion of spiritual and moral certainty. Could any counselor be more wonderful?

2. *Mighty God.* To wisdom he joins power. He is not only the Counselor to legislate, but also the King to execute his laws. His glory is not of the Word only, but also of the Deed. He is the God-Hero, the Deliverer on whose shoulders rests the weight of the world's govern-

ment. He is the world's conqueror, of a sort unlike the historic destroyers, Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon. His might is a different kind of might, which wins through love and convinces through right. He touches tyranny and it crumbles, slavery and it vanishes, wrong and it falls. Around his cradle, like that of Hercules, lie the slain serpents of false philosophies, effete civilizations, dead institutions, and selfish social order. He is the Victor in the eternal conflict between light and darkness.

In the noble words of Richter: "He, the mightiest among the holy and the holiest among the mighty, with his pierced hand has lifted the gates of empire from their hinges, turned the stream of centuries from its channel and still governs the ages."

Above all he has overcome Sin and Death.

3. *Everlasting Father.* We could never be satisfied with a God who was only wisdom and might; the heart longs for love. He is a Father forever. This is the supreme significance of the incarnation; it opens up the heart of God. We

see the hand of God in the heavens, the mind of God in the earth, but the love of God is seen nowhere else as in the glory of grace and truth which shine in the face of Jesus Christ.

"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." He reveals Fatherhood by Sonship. This is Saint Paul's statement of the Advent: "God sent forth his Son." From his first recorded words, when he suggested that the place to find him was his Father's house, to the last word of the cross, commending his Spirit to his Father's care, he was revealing the Father.

Other loves fail; his Fatherhood is eternal. Our earthly fathers die and the world seems a desert, but "Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." Dying men need and have an undying Christ.

"Come to this God, ye weepers, for he weeps;
Come to him, ye who suffer, for he cures;
Come to him, ye who fear, he pity keeps;
Come to him, ye who pass, for he endures."[1]

4. *Prince of Peace.* Fatherhood creates brotherhood. And so the Christmas angels sing, "Peace on earth."

[1] Victor Hugo.

This twentieth century has passed through four of the most terrible Christmas days of history, not white but crimson Christmases. The angelic hymn has been drowned by the horrid din of war. Marching armies, burning cities, ruined homes, blighted beauty, weeping widows, wasted wealth—has Christianity failed? Does a remedy fail when men will not take it? Christianity has not yet been tried.

It is the mundane theory of life that has failed. The deification of force, the great illusion of personal and national self-interest, the preposterous theory of preparedness as insurance against war, the doctrine of grab and get which rules politics and business—all have failed, and we are paying the penalty. "The Empire is peace," said Napoleon, but so is a graveyard. "They make a desolation and call it peace."

What has failed? Government, politics, commerce, science, invention, society, business—all have failed, but "He shall not fail nor be discouraged until he has set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall

wait for his law." There can be no peace in an un-Christian world, a world without Christ. He has not failed; he has brought peace to many humble hearts. He will bring it to the world. In the context, Isaiah pictures the burning up of the implements and munitions of war. That is what the Conquering Christ will do with cannon and Dreadnaughts.

The Prince of the Four Names shall convince the world by his wisdom, subdue it by his might, inspire it with his love, and bless it with his peace.

XII

THE SAGES, THE STAR, AND THE SAVIOUR

ALL things are prophetic to the instructed soul. Columbus could see a new world in a floating branch; to the star-gazers of the Orient a new sign in the sky announced the birth of a Deliverer and King. Suetonius tells us that during the reign of Augustus "throughout the East an old and established opinion was disseminated that it was decreed by fate that they who were to possess the sovereignty of the world were to arise from Judæa." The hope of Israel had filled the world with longing hearts and looking eyes.

Parseeism, the religion of Zoroaster, was perhaps the purest of the ethnic faiths outside of Judaism. These worshipers of flame found in the stars of heaven the secrets of destiny. There is an inner truth in the false science of astrology, this—that there is deep sympathy between

the sensible and the spiritual worlds. When Deborah sings, "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera," it is more than splendid poetry; it is the sublime assertion that the universe is pledged to righteousness.

"Ye stars which are the poetry of heaven!
If in your bright leaves we would read the fate
Of men and empires—'tis to be forgiven
That in our aspirations to be great
Our destinies o'erleap our mortal state,
And claim a kindred with you, for ye are
A beauty and a mystery, and create
In us such love and reverence from afar,
That fortune, fame, power, life have named themselves a star."[1]

God has various voices by which he speaks to men and guides them. A song leads humble shepherds to the Lamb of God, the inward Spirit shows Simeon the Messiah in the Babe, Joseph is taught by a dream, and the wise men by a star. God speaks to every faculty; by the roads of reason, feeling, and imagination he finds a way to the life of man. So true wisdom leads to the Christ. "A little philosophy inclineth man's heart unto

[1] Lord Byron.

atheism, but depth of philosophy bringeth us to providence and deity."

> "Let knowledge grow from more to more,
> And more of reverence in us dwell,
> That mind to soul according well
> May make one music as before."[2]

Lichtenburg well says, "When the mind rises, it throws the body on its knees."

Nature guides to grace. The star led the sages to the Holy City, where they found the Holy Book which should direct them farther in their search. The sky sign pointed to the place in Micah, "Thou, Bethlehem, out of thee shall come a governor whose goings forth have been from everlasting." All the words of God in spangled heavens, on sacred page, and on the face of a little child, speak the same message. "Search and see" is the demand of the intellect. The sages follow the gleam of their own star study, and we see the caravan of camels hasting across the desert wastes and up the Judæan hills in the city of God and the cradle of the Christ. There may be false lights that mislead the mind of man, but all

[2] Alfred Tennyson.

true lights of nature and reason lead at last to the Light of the world. Star, Scripture, Son—such is the threefold revelation of the redemptive purpose.

The heavens have ever been telling the glory of God. Monotheism was born in the desert, "where man is distant and God is near," and where there is nothing worth looking at but the star-studded vault of the sky. When Jean Bon St. Andre, the atheistic revolutionist, said to a Breton peasant, "We will pull down all your church steeples," the undaunted believer responded, "But you can't pull down the stars." Young said, "The undevout astronomer is mad," and Kepler, the founder of modern astronomy, exclaimed, "I think God's thoughts after him."

They sought a king; they heard a Baby cry. In a small inn, in a little town in an obscure province of an enslaved people, they found the "Desire of all nations." There is no higher wisdom than that which knows that bigness is not greatness. The sages see the Saviour in the young child, more glorious in his helpless

infancy than any blazing meteor of their adored heavens, and "they worshiped him." True wisdom bows to the Babe and sees God in the manger. If we had insight enough to see in every newborn child a "holy thing," the incarnation would soon cease to puzzle our reason, through the light it gives to the heart. Wordsworth's apostrophe to the Child in his "Intimations of Immortality" most beautifully expresses the truth that God could nowhere in nature or life reveal himself more perfectly than in the babe.

"Thou whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy soul's immensity, . . .
Haunted forever by the eternal mind,
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest
Which we are toiling all our lives to find."

XIII

THE KING AND THE KINGS—AN EPIPHANY MEDITATION

MORE than the Oriental Magi were looking for some great birth of time at the period of the advent of our Lord. Only a few years previously Virgil, in his Fourth Eclogue, had sung of a child who should bring back the age of gold. The hope of Israel had filled the world with longing and looking. In his marvelously beautiful tragedy of *Herod*, Stephen Phillips has made us feel

> "A sense of something coming in the world,
> A crying of dead prophets from their tombs,
> A singing of dead poets from their graves."

No wonder that Herod was troubled. There is no terror to tyrants like the coming of a new order. The forces of reaction take advantage of every time of social and political unrest to scare the people because they themselves are alarmed. But there is a holy insurgency in history which is forever dooming the

dominion of the regulars. The kings cower before the coming of the King. And so it is true in every age when the ever-returning Christ makes his world to pass through the furnace of transformation, that "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel against Jehovah and against his Anointed."

The kings cannot understand the King. The rulers who gather armies and build warships cannot comprehend the Prince of Peace. Herod, the friend of Antony, the ally of Augustus, the builder of cities, the maker of marble magnificences, has no kinship of spirit with the Carpenter-King who has his throne in human hearts and whose spiritual craftsmanship shall build a spiritual city outlasting all pyramids and palaces. And thus the poet has interpreted his fearful mood:

"Wandering night by night
Among the people of Jerusalem,
I hear a whispering of some new King,
A child who is to sit where I am sitting,
And he shall charm and soothe, and breathe and bless;
The roaring of war shall cease upon the air,
Falling of tears and all the voices of sorrow,

And he shall take the terror from the grave;
A gentle Sovereign. Ah, might there not be
Some power in gentleness that we dream not of?"

The proud, passionate Idumean tyrant cannot learn that lesson; he knows no way to meet the peril to his selfish sovereignty but to trample, crush, corrupt, and kill. He is a type of that world spirit which still possesses the nations, which knows no path to power and prosperity but that opened by reeking swords and roaring cannons.

In old tradition, the Wise Men who came from the East were three kings, who fulfill in their adoration the prophetic word that kings should come to the brightness of his rising, falling down before Him and offering gifts. Kings they may not have been in any political sense, but they were, indeed, princes in the empire of the mind. It is the prerogative of true wisdom to see the reality which forever hides behind the shows of sense.

"To see the world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour."[1]

[1] William Blake.

These visitors from the land of dawn came with the morning freshness in their souls; they had the kingliness that could recognize real royalty. When Herod slew, they offered tribute; when he was troubled, "they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." The wise man is the world's true sovereign; he can read divine meanings in the stars and see God in a little child. The true monarchs of mankind are not those who were born in the purple and whose brows bear the diadem, but the men of vision who follow the gleam of the ideal. You will always find these true kings, the supreme poets and prophets, prostrate at the cradle of the Christ. The incarnation is a stumbling-block only to little minds without the sense of spiritual values.

The Babe in the Virgin's arms has given the world a new notion of kingship; more than that, he has unveiled a new vision of God. Slaves to our senses, fooled by the pomp and glitter of external things, we needed a new measure of worth. So when he found all chambers full he lay down in manger-bed; when all

other mansions were occupied he moved into the carpenter shop; when all other crowns were taken he chose a crown of thorns; when all other thrones were full he made a cross the seat of his spiritual sway. He is still "the Revealer of hearts," "a sign to be spoken against."

"A King without regalia,
A God without the thunder,
A Child without the heart to play;
Aye, a Creator rent asunder
From his first glory, cast away
Upon his own world."[2]

The "wisdom" which none of the rulers of this world knew is ours, if, like the kingly Magi, we can confess the true King, and bring some worthy gift, the gold of royalty in service, the incense of worship, and the myrrh of sacrifice.

The Kings of Orient have brought
The treasures of the earth and sea,
Fit presents for the King they sought:
What offering is there left for me?

I cannot bring to crown my Christ
From far Cathay its glittering gold.
Nor Araby's perfumes unpriced,
Nor pearls from India's seas uprolled.

[2] Mrs. Browning.

Nor of the wealth that decks the mind,
The gold of thought and fancy's flowers,
In one fair diadem entwined,
To fitly crown this King of ours;

But I with humble shepherds come,
With them the heralds' hymn I hear;
O make, dear Lord, this heart thy home,
And turn to pearl each bitter tear!

XIV

NUNC DIMITTIS—THE SWAN SONG OF A SAINT

BRIEF biographies are the best. The Bible is rich with these vivid pictures of human life, penned in a few striking phrases. The story of Simeon, the singer of that sweetest canticle, the *Nunc Dimittis*, is a very cameo, cut with perfect art. Little as is told, he is counted worthy of one of the "Beholds!" of the Bible. That index finger of high value is followed by a perfect picture of the character of a saint.

Simeon had an all-round religion; he is described as a "just and devout man." He was righteous toward his fellow men and reverent toward God. Heaven and earth were joined in his character; piety and morality met in his life. In him were united both the inward inspiration and the outward expression of true religion.

This saintly soul had a noble patience;

he was "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Hebrew history had been filled with such watchers and waiters. The forward look is the chief characteristic of patriarch and prophet. As Jesus has told us, Abraham rejoiced at the sight of his coming day. And although the voice of prophecy had been silent for centuries, still to the Temple at Jerusalem there came seerlike souls whose faces were turned toward the dawning. We know the names of two of them—Anna, the aged prophetess on whose lips still trembled the message of divine inspiration, and Simeon, whose eyes, dimmed with age, were suddenly lighted with the gleam of the new day.

God needs patient waiters as well as earnest workers, for waiting is a part of the discipline of life.

"God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best; his state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest.
They also serve, who only stand and wait."[1]

[1] John Milton.

Simeon was well aware that real waiting is more than mere passivity, but includes watching. So he was constantly in the house of God; he was there when the lily-shafts of the Temple caught the crimson glory of dawn, and when the evening lamps were lighted he lingered still. How every rumor made his heart throb with expectancy! Had the shepherds' story reached his ears? How he must have scanned the face of every little child brought into the Temple courts! And in that place of duty and worship, there came at last the revelation.

His was an inspired old age. Youth is not better than age when the latter is filled with holy fire. He had December on his head, but May within his heart. Such lives are like the evening primrose whose color and fragrance await the gathering shadows to develop its perfect beauty. No spell can keep the heart young like the grace of God; it is the genuine elixir of life, the true fountain of youth. It is vastly fine for age to look forward in our times as well with hope for the church and the world; when it

takes the child in its arms then will fall the prophetic fire. And this length of forward vision gives breadth as well. Simeon, who is waiting for the consolation, must include in his canticle that fine phrase from the ancient Oracle of Consolation which describes the Servant of Jehovah as a "Light to lighten the Gentiles." Spirituality clears his soul of bigotry. Beautiful old age, when hope lingers and when the mind grows broader and not narrower with increasing years!

God had promised Simeon that "he should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ." In some senses all life is conditional; "a man is immortal until his work is done"—that is, until the purpose of a life is consummated. Healthy folks do not want to die. As Horace says, "No man goes satisfied from the feast of life." Muhlenberg was disappointed in love when he wrote, "I would not live alway." But to see Christ consummates life; it is to behold life's full pattern and guess its deepest secret. When this full vision comes, then only can the soul sing *Nunc Dimittis*, the sunset hymn of life

after the day's work is done, the golden melody of a softly fading light that melts into the eternal morning.

"Mine eyes have seen thy salvation!" What did he see? Surely no aureoled brow, no infant marked from others by an encircling nimbus of light; he saw only the peasant Babe in swaddling clothes that the shepherds found in the manger at Bethlehem. He has that loftier vision that knows that redemption cannot come by power but by love. And so he takes the child in his aged arms, while he himself rests his soul in the spiritual strength of the Divine Child. To see Jesus by faith is to see salvation.

To see Christ is to prepare for death; it prepares life's flower for plucking and its fruit for gathering. Though we live far inland, it is sometimes good to lend an ear to the seaward breezes that bring to us the music of the far-off ocean; so it is often well in hours of strength and joy to think of death. "See death," we must, every one of us; but have you seen the Lord's Christ? See him before you die, and you shall not be afraid to

see him beyond that horror-haunted chasm mortals call the grave, but which Christ has made the portal of paradise.

Let us listen to Simeon's song in its entirety:

> "Now, Master, let thy servant go,
> Go in peace, as thou didst promise.
> Mine eyes have seen thy saving power
> Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples.
> A light of revealing to the Gentiles
> And the glory of thy people Israel."

Death is release to the faithful servant; it is emancipation to the slaves of mortality. Jesus has transformed death from doom into deliverance. In Æschylus' tragedy of *Agamemnon*, he pictures a house servant, watching on the roof of the palace at Mycenæ, waiting for the signal of the fall of Troy. Seeing that sign will release him from his long vigil. At last it comes, the beacon fires blazing from isle to isle across the Ægean, and he descends from weary waiting to find sleep and rest. So it was with Simeon. He had tarried long in expectation, and at last the herald angels flashed the good

tidings from star to star across the seas of space until it reached the earth and the child who had come from the bosom of the Father to the bosom of Mary passes to the longing arms of Simeon, the son of the promise. Deliverance has come!

In the Old Testament we often meet dark views of death. The words fairly shudder as they fall from the pen of the writers: "Lover and friend thou hast put far from me, and mine acquaintance in darkness." But in this swan song of Simeon, *Nunc Dimittis*, Christmas looks forward to Easter Day in its testimony of the soul's victory over death. The grim visitor of the skeleton hand and icy touch has become a fair angel whose lips are melodious with the music of heaven, and whose hands are full of the fragrance of its flowers. Let pessimistic Hamlet moan, "The rest is silence"; Christian faith looks in the face of the Risen Lord and cries, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation!"

How dreary are the worldling's thoughts of death! The reckless humor of Rabelais clouds with seriousness as he faces "the great Perhaps"; Hobbes, the deist, shrinks

as he gasps, "I am taking a leap in the dark"; Gambetta, struck by the assassin's bullet, cries, *Je suis perdu*, "I am lost!" But John Wesley writes, "Our people die well," and himself bravely faces the future, saying, "The best of all is God is with us." Paul puts this triumphant truth in a perfect phrase: "To live is Christ, to die is gain." Death the despot has become the deliverer. Is it any wonder that the great Christian hymn, *Te Deum Laudamus*, brings close together the messages of the two great Christian festivals, Christmas and Easter Day?

"When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man
Thou didst humble thyself to be born of a Virgin;
When thou didst overcome the sharpness of death,
Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all
believers."

In nearly all liturgies, the *Nunc Dimittis* is used as an evening hymn. It is very fitting for the vesper hour of fading light. But it is also a matin hymn, for it sees in the evening star of memory the morning star of hope.

"So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed
And yet anon repairs his drooping head

And tricks his beams and with new spangled ore
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky."[1]

Thus the first Christmas day not only surrounded with song the cradle of the Christ but has filled with holy harmony the dying hours of his followers. Thomas Guthrie on his deathbed called for music, and when asked what they should sing, replied, "Just give me a bairnie's hymn!" For death is birth to the saved soul. There is a music of the borderland such as Tennyson's May Queen heard "in the wild March morning":

"So now I think my time is near. I trust it is. I know
The blessed music went that way my soul will have to go."

In her passing hours, Susanna Wesley, the mother of Methodism, said to her family and friends, "Children, when I am gone sing a psalm of praise to God!" And, a little later, they broke the strange stillness left by the departure of a saintly soul with a song of sacred joy and went forth to preach and sing the gospel message and music around the world. Even

[1] John Milton.

John Keats felt that death has been transformed into triumph:

> "Let me have music dying,
> I seek no more delight."

And that hour of departure and deliverance hears not only the parting pæans of human friends who answer its invitation,

> "Come sing to me of heaven
> When I am called to die,
> Sing songs of holy ecstasy
> To waft my soul on high,"

but their spiritual senses are often strengthened to hear singing that earthly ears cannot hear. All about this dying world, whose songs at last sink into silence, is sung by spirit voices the unending symphony of Life Eternal.

The *Nunc Dimittis* is the swan song of a saint, but it is also the overture of the New Song of the Redeemed. Christmas, the birthday of the Saviour of men, has turned all death-days of his disciples into the birthday of immortality. The Even-Song of Simeon is a Matin Hymn of the New Day.

XV

THE BLESSED BOYHOOD OF JESUS

THE Gospel according to Saint Luke touches the life of our Lord at every point—the Babe in the manger, the Child in Simeon's arms, the Boy in the Temple, and the Man of Galilee. It is preeminently the gospel of the Son of Man, using his perfect humanity as an organ on which to play the music of his divinity. For the Christ was not less, but more man than the rest of us. His complete humanity serves to reveal his divine nature, just as a flawless crystal transmits the sunlight unstained.

There is a wise reticence in the gospel accounts of the youth of Jesus. There are in them none of the repelling marvels of the apocryphal stories, which, utterly ignoring all natural boyishness, picture him as working absurd and sometimes spiteful miracles. There is no unearthly halo around his brow. He is a truly human child, with a normal physical, men-

tal, and spiritual development. There is no hint of any hot-bed precocity; happy is the child who is not born grown-up. The first duty of any child is to be young, and the second is to grow.

If the Saviour of men had appeared full grown, he would have been fatally separated from us; he revealed the worth of childhood to a world that had hitherto disregarded it. Henceforth every babe is "that holy thing," a new memory of Eden bringing back the Golden Age. May we not believe that still, in the depths of his divine consciousness, every fact of his human career abides as a present possession. He is still mighty with the strong and weak with the weak. For the babe, he still lies on his mother bosom; for the boy, he still plays in the carpenter shop; for the workman, he still toils at his trade.

At the age of adolescence, like every other Jewish boy, he is confirmed as a "son of the law," and goes with his parents to Jerusalem for the great Paschal sacrament. With what delight any child makes the first visit to a great city! We can

hear his boyish voice joining in the Pilgrim psalms: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my help"; "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go up to the house of Jehovah"; "My soul waiteth for the Lord"; up to that final chorus when, standing in the Temple courts, they chanted, "Behold, bless ye Jehovah, all ye servants of Jehovah," and the white-robed priests intoned the answering benediction, "Jehovah, that made heaven and earth, bless thee out of Zion." As he listened to the antiphonal chanting of the temple choirs, did he not recall the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus*, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and the *Nunc Dimittis*, of which his mother had doubtless told him, and find in them a transition from the psalmody of the Old Testament to the newborn minstrelsy of his New Testament church. How his heart throbbed with an awful gladness at this vision of the city of David, the throne of Solomon, the fortress of the Maccabees, soon to become the scene of his own suffering and the site of his sepulcher! He must have recalled this experience when, twenty

years later, he heard other children singing their "Hosannas!" in the Temple.

Hofmann's lovely picture of "The Boy Jesus in the Temple," can add little or nothing to the exquisite narrative of Luke. The story is a single flower from the secluded garden of his life, plucked just as it was swelling toward full blossom. The lost boy is found, not among the sights and scenes of the strange city, but in his "Father's house." Where else should his sorrowing parents have looked for him? Not they alone, but every father and mother some time must learn and bear this hard lesson—that their child is no longer wholly theirs, but must live an independent life. It is an awful and lonely moment when the spontaneous life of the child passes into the reflective life of the budding man, when he cries, as Richter put it, "I am a *Me!*" The old routine and formulas will not longer serve; the individual stands out from the tribe, "wrapped in the solitude of his own originality." Every child has two educations, man's and God's, and it is indeed fortunate when these blend in perfect unison.

Then follow eighteen years of waiting whose only record is, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." They were not idle years, but filled with a silent growth. It was not a development from the imperfect to the perfect, but rather the constant unfolding of a nature perfect at every stage of its growth. As from the flawless block of marble little by little is disengaged the artist's ideal, so God's pleasure grows with his growth until its full disclosure in his gracious public ministry. Secretly in his spirit is shaping the vision of the Kingdom. His knowledge of his own nature seems to have been a truly human knowledge; from the germ of a unique filial relation to the Father, now realized in the temple courts, it unfolds until fully ready to hear the voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son!"

Obedience to his earthly parents was a part of his training for divine Sonship. There is never any real conflict between a divine mission and a human duty.

"O thou whose infant feet were found
Within thy Father's shrine,

Whose years with changeless glory crowned,
Were all alike divine;

"Dependent on thy bounteous breath,
We seek thy grace alone,
In childhood, manhood, age, and death,
To keep us still thine own."[1]

[1] Reginald Heber.

A POSTLUDE

The Canticles of the Incarnation disclose the spiritual significance of song. Music is the most mystic of all arts—the one best fitted to express the heavenly life. It is the speech of emotion and can express grief or joy as no other medium can. No wonder that the Bible is as full of music as the forest of birdsong. For it is a sort of universal speech—the one most expressive of the subtler states of the soul.

Music is a witness of the unseen world. Its material, the vibrations of air, is the least tangible of all earthly elements. Its origin is divine. As Confucius said, "Heaven is the house of hymns." The redeemed are described in the Apocalypse as "having the harps of God." It is the language of the angels, the dialect of the New Jerusalem.

As the religious arts are the greatest of all arts, religious songs are the highest of all songs. There are secular songs, sweet

and inspiring, such as boat-songs when the "oars keep time to the music's chime," harvest-songs accompanied by the rhythmic rustle of falling grain, and national songs measured by the marching of mighty hosts. But sweetest of *all*, and the source of all, are the high praises of God, the songs of the sanctuary, the songs of heaven. As we praise God here below by service, we shall serve him in the high countries by praise.

Bethlehem and Calvary have given birth to a *New* Song. Heaven had great music before—the chant of creation choired by the morning stars, the hymn of seraphs heard by prophetic ears, and the Christmas Canticles to which we have been listening. But after the cross, the perfumed air of paradise is stirred with a new and divine melody, unheard in heaven before. It is the hymn of the new creation, the song of the firstborn of earth.

For the incarnation and the atonement have introduced a new theme into life. Even the angels cannot sing it. It is of a love never seen or felt before. None sing like redeemed souls. Redemption is

greater than creation; it starts the song of the new heavens and the new earth. The New Song is the *Te Deum* of the rescued after the greatest of all conflicts—the battle of the cross with sin and death.

It is a *new* song, one that misses all the monotony of earthly music. Even the loveliest airs sometimes tire us. John Stuart Mill lamented the limitations of music—only five tones and two semitones in the scale—how soon it would be exhausted! But the new life will never know weariness or satiety. Forever fresh scenery, new thoughts, joys, and experiences, new hearts, lives, hopes, and graces, new disclosures of God, and new triumphs of his love. Forever new souls come home to glory and new worlds are conquered by his love. The new life has no stale praises; its songs keep pace with an unfailing Providence, as the enthroned Lamb continually opens the seals of his book of mystery.

It is a new choir that sings. It is a mighty chorus—they believe in congregational singing up there! It is made up

of the attuned chords of many types of consecrated character. There is a unanimity in their chorus—the "sound as of many waters and mighty thunderings." And they are trained singers. Only such can sing a new tune well.

Earth trained them. They bring the human note into heaven as the Christmas angels brought the celestial music down to earth. In the organ of eternity, the *vox humana* is a necessary stop, the sweetest that sends forth all elemental voices. It is made out of earth's experience of troubles and disasters. It began on earth. These new choristers of glory came

> "Out of the mire
> Into the choir."

Across the sea that once tossed with storm and tempest, floats this heavenly hymn and the tossing waves become a glassy sea shining with celestial fire. Trial is the training for the new song. "These are they that came out of great tribulation." Some naturalists claim that the songs of birds had their origin in cries

of pain. Shelley says, "Our sweetest songs are filled with saddest thought," and thus describes the education of the poets, "They learn in suffering what they teach in song." Music is not a cold art that a cold heart can learn. Even the blessed angels in their loving ministries can never sing as we shall some day. They have never known the moaning of that dismal sea we call death. In our mundane misery, God is tuning his human harps for the eternal symphony.

That new choir is a vested choir; they are clothed in white robes. They follow the Lamb in his sacrifice and in his sinlessness. "Therefore are they near the throne." Theirs is the faith that falters not, the purity that palters not, and the love that alters not.

Have we not caught in the Canticles of the first Christmas the keynote of that new song? Surely, that new chord was sounded when the angelic army cried "Glory!" as the seraph preacher gave to the shepherds the sign of the swaddling bands and the manger bed. Now we can understand why the early church fol-

lowed the *Gloria in Excelsis* with the words:

"O Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
That takest away the sins of the world,
Have mercy upon us."

Song has always been joined to sacrifice. Even in the ancient chronicles we read: "When the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began also." The slain Lamb, the supreme sacrifice, whose birth came in a tide of heavenly and earthly music, by his death has started a new song. The Christmas Canticles have grown into an everlasting oratorio sung by the heirs of salvation.

"O that, with yonder sacred throng,
We at his feet may fall!
We'll join the everlasting song,
And crown him Lord of all!"